SHORT STORIES

No. 794. Week Ending March 19, 1904. Price One Penny.

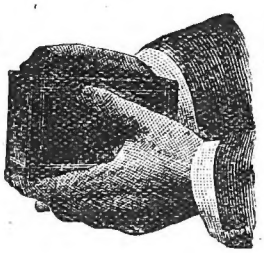
The fate of both brave men depended on her answer. Whom would she choose?

(A Dramatic Incident from the Powerful Story "The Geisha's Choice." See inside.)

Digitized by Google

BROWNIE KODAKS

For BOYS and GIRLS.



THE No. 1 BROWNIE

giving Photographs 2½in. x 2½in.
Price 5s. only.

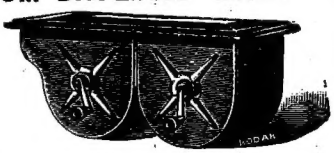
THE No. 2 BROWNIE

giving Photographs 3¼in. x 3¼in.
Price 10s. only.

For Ladies, Cyclists, &c.
The FOLDING POCKET KODAKS
from £2 2s. to £3 12s. 6d.

THE DARK ROOM DISPENSED WITH!

KODAK Daylight Developing Machine.



Develops Films in Daylight—Gaslight—Any Light—Anywhere.

10s. to 45s.

Marvellously Simple and Efficient.

Of all Photographic Dealers, or of

KODAK Ltd., Dept. 35, 41-43 Clerkenwell Rd., London, E.C.

J. G. GRAVES'

THE NEW

'ELEGANT' PARCEL, 35/-

CONTAINS:

Twill Vicuna Costume (Coat and Skirt), made in the latest style, as illustrated; Colours: Black, Navy, Brown, and Green.
Stylish Blouse of Fine Quality Figured Sateen with New Yoke and Sleeves.
Frilled Underskirt of Mercerised Sateen, Check or Stripe.
Pair French Kid Gloves, black or tan.
Pair Model Corsets, splendidly shaped.

Sent on receipt of Order enclosing 5/- and your promise to complete the purchase by monthly payments of 5/-. If not perfectly satisfied return the parcel and deposit will be refunded in full.

Important. When ordering give (1) Bust Measure. (2) Length of Sleeve inside. (3) Length of Skirt in Front. (4) Size of Corsets. (5) Size of Gloves. (6) Colours.

Illustrated Catalogue of Fashionable Costumes and Patterns Free.

AGENTS WANTED. Good Pay. No Responsibility. Write for Terms.

J. G. GRAVES, 169 DIVISION STREET, **SHEFFIELD**

SONGS COPIED

Legible as print, 5d. page; transposed correctly, 6d. page.

Mrs. CONYERS,
Chagford, R.S.O., Devon.

Recommended by the Marchioness of Waterford, Lady Arthur Hill, Miss Ellen Terry, etc.

SAPON

THE IDEAL CLEANSER

A harmless vegetable compound which dissolves grease so wonderfully that the dirt "drops out" without rubbing and the clothes last longer.

Dissolve the Sapon *thoroughly* in water; put the clothes into the solution and

SOAK,
SQUEEZE,
RINSE,
WRING. (That's all.)

Send a post-card to **SAPON LTD.** (Dept. 65), St. Swithin's Chambers, London, for a

FREE TRIAL PACKET.

Kaputine

THE SAFE REMEDY

CURES IN TEN MINUTES

Headache,

Neuralgia & all Nerve Pains

One dose of **Kaputine,** costing 1d., cures in ten minutes the most violent nerve pain,—every time.

Kaputine is not an aperient, and causes no inconvenience, but is for one purpose only—to cure Nerve Pains.

Kaputine goes right to the seat of the trouble—the Nerves—and gives immediate relief.

Kaputine, unlike the dangerous white headache powders consisting of one crude drug, is composed of several approved ingredients having the full confidence of the Medical Profession.

Kaputine is sold by all Medicine Dealers, **Packets of 18 doses,** 1/-. Samples 1d. each.

Write now for samples free and post paid to

G. G. Kaputine, Huddersfield.

GOOGLE LIBRARY 10 MAR 190

Digitized by Google

Containing the Incident Depicted on the Cover.

SHORT STORIES

No. 794.] WEEK ENDING MARCH 19TH, 1904. [ONE PENNY.

The Geisha's Choice.

Telling How a Japanese Girl Had to Choose Between a British Sailor and a Japanese Soldier, and How She Sent One Lover on a Terrible Journey.

"WHAT is the matter with you, my dear fellow?"

The question was asked in perfect English and with but the slightest trace of a foreign accent, yet the inquirer was unmistakably Japanese. His name was Hosaki. He was a man of forty, of striking features, dressed in European costume.

He addressed a younger man than himself. This was Lieutenant Ralph Thornton, of His Britannic Majesty's Navy; he was not more than twenty-five, with frankness and courage written on every part of a handsome face. A captivating face, as Hosaki admitted to himself; an attractive man altogether. It did one's heart good to have a grip of that hand, which could be as soft as silk when touching that of a lady, and yet could grip a man's with a force that made one wonder if one's fingers were intact after the ordeal. Ralph Thornton was staring vacantly in front, with knitted brows, and his partly-smoked cigar had gone out. He aroused himself with a start as Hosaki's words fell upon his ears.

"Eh? Er—I really didn't hear what you said!" he remarked in confusion.

"You appear to be in dreamland, my friend!" returned Hosaki, smiling gravely. "You were as lively when you came to Tokyo as you were when I knew you in your own great country; but during the last few days you have been dreaming. Are you worrying lest your country should be drawn into the war which little Japan is about to make against the northern trespasser, Russia?"

Ralph Thornton's lip curled scornfully. "Why *worrying?*" he asked. "Have we not shown that we can play our part, friend Hosaki?"

"Yes!" The word came emphatically, yet quietly. "Ah!" continued Hosaki, his eyes kindling. "One day—one day the glorious little Land of the Rising Sun will be as great as Britain has made herself! But enough! To speak plainly, something is troubling you, Thornton. What is it?"

"Oh, I think not!" cried Ralph; but his face flushed a little.

Hosaki's keen eyes were fixed full on the Lieutenant's face; a gleam of understanding came over the countenance of the Jap.

"I think I can guess, and I am not surprised, although I think you are foolish, my friend!" he said slowly. "You have been thus since you saw Ashkita! The geisha has captivated you!"

All rights reserved.]

"And what if she has?" inquired Thornton defiantly. His secret was discovered, and he faced his interrogator boldly.

"I think you are foolish!" came quietly from Hosaki's lips.

"Have you anything to say against her?" asked Ralph haughtily.

"Nothing!" was the emphatic rejoinder. "She is lovely, accomplished, pure; she is of noble descent, a granddaughter of one of the feudal lords who gave up his lands in the Revolution and died poor. Ashkita has to earn a living, and she does it well and honestly by singing and playing. She would make a good wife; but are you serious in thinking that you would wed one of the women of my race?"

Ralph Thornton reflected. It had hardly occurred to him to think of aught but of his love for the lovely girl whom he had seen for the first time nearly a week previously in a house in the southern Ku district, and whom he had seen every evening since, although Hosaki did not know this last fact.

"Yes, I would!" he said with deliberation. "I confess that I love her; it is no infatuation, for I have had time to think. I am not imbued with the prejudice of many Europeans against your race, Hosaki; your people have proved themselves to be great! Moreover, Ashkita is not a mere automaton, as some of your women are—I mean no offence, but you recognise the truth of my remarks, for you have not allowed all your women to have fair play. Ashkita is a woman whom anyone, unless he had no heart or possessed one of stone, could not help loving. She is a descendant of a Daimyo, and in our Society at home she would take a prominent place."

"I believe all that!" assented Hosaki gravely. "Yet I question the wisdom of your choice. Think well before you decide. Remember the ordeal to which she would be subjected if you placed her in English Society. You must reflect before you break her heart!"

"Hosaki, I have seen her every day since that evening!" said Thornton, rising and placing his hand on his friend's shoulder. "Whenever I go abroad in the streets of your busy capital, which resembles a European rather than an Eastern city, I look for her. In the glorious five-mile avenue which you call Mukojima, in the jinrickshas and the modern trams and omnibuses, on the banks of the Sumida, everywhere. The Spring is coming, and I may not be here when the cherry-trees bloom and you hold your pretty festival in honour of the blossom, but I shall picture Ashkita and the cherry-blossom together, a fitting pair. That is," he added quickly, and with a sharp inhalation of his breath, "if I cannot persuade her to come with me when I go!"

Hosaki smoked his strange little Japanese pipe; his imperturbable face betrayed nothing of the workings of his mind.

Digitized by Google

"So be it!" he said suddenly. "I have told you! You will remember, also, that she is not of your religion; that she is of the old religion, which you would call heathen! Let us go out."

They left the house and made their way to the Government quarter of the city. It was a quaint scene, for Tokyo still has much of the ancient, in dress and manners, among the modernity which has taken possession of it. In the course of their stroll a jinricksha passed them, and they saw Ashkita in the curious two-wheeled carriage with its human draught animal. She waved a salutation to them and was gone.

"Is she not lovely, divine?" demanded Ralph Thornton enthusiastically.

His companion assented; there was no gainsaying the beauty of the girl, for she was little more. It would have been difficult not to agree with Ralph's assertion that Ashkita would become a queen of Society if the opportunity were given to her.

"I must see her again, see her where I can speak to her!" declared Ralph Thornton decisively. "Can you help me, Hosaki?"

"Yes. I will conduct you to where you will see her," said Hosaki, with his usual gravity. "But," he added, not without a sign of hesitation, "suppose that there is another who loves her, and suppose that she——"

"You know my motto!" cried the Lieutenant, with true sailorly spirit. "I will not go round the corner to meet troubles, and I trust to my own resources to get through them when they do come. Whoever he is, if he exists, I shall pit myself against him."

Nevertheless, like a true lover, he could not prevent a feeling of uneasiness during the rest of the day, and that feeling was increased when, on seeing Ashkita in the evening, he intuitively detected his rival in Captain Nakamurah Iyayogo, a dashing military officer of a crack Japanese regiment. The revelation was none the less disagreeable from the fact that Iyayogo was an old friend, whom he had also met in England. It is some satisfaction to a lover when his rival is a stranger, because he feels fully at liberty to hate the fellow.

There was a large party, and several accomplished ladies were entertaining the guests. Ashkita was in a secluded corner when Thornton interrupted the quiet conversation between Captain Iyayogo and the geisha.

"You have come again!" said Ashkita, her face lighting up, as Thornton placed himself by her side, after having exchanged a hearty greeting with his old military acquaintance. "And have you any news of this terrible Russian Bear? Captain Iyayogo tells me that war is about to begin."

"What is she worrying herself about him for?" thought the sailor in vexation. "I suppose she thinks he will get killed! He is a good fellow, and a splendid soldier, I should say, but I don't want him here!" Aloud, he answered: "I have no news. I do not desire any, for an outbreak of war would mean that I must leave here, and——"

He did not finish, but a look more eloquent than spoken message caused Ashkita to drop her eyes and Iyayogo to knit his brows.

"War would take me away also," said the last mentioned. "Would that grieve you?"

A quick uplifting of the geisha's eyes to meet his, and then Ashkita laughed to hide her agitation.

"I should be sorry to lose you both, you are my good friends!" she smiled, speaking in Japanese, but so distinctly that the young sailor had no difficulty in understanding.

As she dropped her eyes again the two men shot angry glances at one another, but the geisha noticed this and made a move towards another part of the immense room.

"Let us go with the others, sir!" she said in pretty English to Ralph. And she turned to Iyayogo without observing that her attractive style of pronouncing his mother tongue had heaped a little more fuel on the flames of love.

Lieutenant Thornton, with the alertness of a British sailor, watched for his opportunity, saw it, and seized it. Before Captain Iyayogo realised it, Ashkita was being guided to another corner by his rival, and he himself found that he was button-holed by a comrade in arms.

"Ashkita!" cried Ralph ardently. "Why do you look so vexed at the thought of Captain Iyayogo going away? He surely does not love you as I do! Listen to me!" he cried, in an impetuous undertone. "You have taken my heart from me; can you give me yours? Will you be my wife, will you come with me to England, the friend of your country, where you would be a very queen of beauty among women? I can give you wealth and position, but I know you do not want these."

Ashkita was unable to follow all the words of this passionate appeal, but the tone of voice and the look in the Lieutenant's face supplied the deficiency. Her bosom heaved, and she hid her face for a moment or two in her hands.

"You do not mean what you say, I fear you do not!" she cried appealingly. "Why do you torment me with insincere words?"

She looked boldly at him now, hope and fear mingling in that gaze.

"I mean it, every word!" vowed Ralph warmly. "I have been in love with you since the first day I saw you. Will you come with me, Ashkita?"

He bent forward eagerly, pressing for a reply. Ashkita sighed heavily.

"I cannot believe that you would care for me, that you would like to stand by my side in your English Society! And I am sad of heart for another reason! But you cannot understand! No, leave me and forget me!"

"Never!" he whispered almost fiercely in his love for this beautiful Eastern girl. "I would face anyone, anything for you, Ashkita! I would die for you!"

She interrupted him with a gesture.

Leave me now!" she intreated. "I do not know, I cannot think! It is too difficult!"

Hosaki and Captain Iyayogo were approaching. The latter wore a smile on his face, and he tried to hide his annoyance at Ralph's having had a private talk with Ashkita.

"Let us be going, friend!" said Hosaki, taking Ralph by the arm. "Come!" he whispered, as the sailor would have resisted; "we must be going, and you will have to leave Japan, as you are still in the British service, for war is as good as declared!"

"Is it really so?" queried Lieutenant Thornton sadly. "Then I wish indeed that I were in the service of Britain's ally, for I cannot bear to think of leaving Ashkita!"

Hosaki led him gently away, and Ralph had the annoyance in his turn, of seeing his rival in full possession of the field.

"Why do you encourage him?" demanded Captain Iyayogo, almost angrily. "Ashkita, whom do you love? Is it possible that you can prefer a man from the West to one of your own race? Ashkita," he went on, in a soft, caressing tone, "Ashkita, is my love for you all in vain? Listen to me, let me plead with you!"

"Nakamurah," said the girl, placing a delicate finger on his arm, the mere touch of which sent a thrill through his entire frame, "he is brave, he is devoted to me! He says he would die for me, if I called upon him to do so! How can I help admiring him? He comes of a great race and he would take me to live among the highest in his own land! Here I am only Ashkita. Yes, I admire him, and admiration, like pity, is near to love!"

"It cannot be, it shall not be so!" he burst forth passionately. "I care not if you are only Ashkita! But you are of noble birth, and I am just as able to give you position as he, and that position will be with your own people! Ah, I see that you waver! Which of us do you really love?"

"I cannot say, I will not say!" she cried in anguish of spirit. "War is declared; I caught Hosaki's words! And I am troubled! Our country is fighting for its freedom; if it loses this fight, where will it be? Tell me!" she added impulsively, "would *you* be willing to risk your life for me?"

"Yes!" he said simply, but decisively. There was no bravado about it, but there was no mistaking the intensity of the tone in which it was uttered. "What will life be without you?"

Digitized by Google

"Then come to me to-morrow! I have something on my mind. You know where! And bring the Englishman with you. Nay, be not angry! You are friends, and you are both good men and true. Come together!"

Captain Iyayogo bowed and left her. His heart throbbed at the thought of war, because for nine years it had been expected, and now Japan had the chance of driving the aggressor backwards! But his fierce joy was tempered by his love for Ashkita; he was troubled, he had a rival who was likely to be successful! For a moment he felt that he could hate the handsome Britisher, but his sterling better nature prevailed immediately.

"He is brave and honourable! I like him!" he murmured. "We will fight the battle of love fairly and the defeated one will take his defeat gallantly. I know him, and I can emulate the spirit of the British!"

Ashkita was sad and wept several times during the ensuing twenty-four hours; after the manner of her own religion, she prayed, and turned her face in the direction of the sacred volcanic mountain that towered into the clouds and from which the war-god, the first of the sacred line of the Mikados, came to rule Nippon. She started in fear and turned to fly when, at the appointed hour, the two friends and rivals paid the visit which she had asked for.

"Can I face them? What am I about to do?" she moaned. "Yet it must be done!"

She nerved herself for what was to follow, and met them with a gracious smile that had something wan about it, in spite of herself; she welcomed them, and then addressed them in a firm voice:

"War is declared. I feel that it will be a great struggle, and one in which our land will require all the help it can obtain! I am of the old religion; both Westerns and my own modernised compatriots may laugh at me, but I firmly believe in the things which were taught me! I believe that the gods will listen to one who will go to the top of one of the sacred mountains which still burns with the holy fire.

"I know that you Europeans call them volcanoes, but they are more than that! You do not understand! To him who will go to the top of such a mountain, of which we have yet many, and who will descend into the hollow and offer up the prayer which I will teach him, to that one will come a certain death, but his action will bring an answer to that prayer! My prayer is that Japan shall win! Alas, I am not strong enough to climb, and I turn to one of you and ask that he will do this for me, that I may save the country I love because it gave me birth! Which of you loves me well enough to die for me?"

Iyayogo understood the awful significance of her request immediately, but Thornton had to reflect ere it dawned upon him. Poor child of superstition! How he would teach her that such beliefs were nonsense, gently, tenderly, as he would a little child! How sweet would life be with her, training her simple nature to a knowledge of what was real!

Ashkita waited, anxiously, breathlessly, for a sign from either. The two men looked at one another with understanding glances; it was the crucial test! Each had sworn that he would die for her, if need be, and she was calling for a fulfilment of that vow! It was death on the volcanic mountain, or life with Ashkita!

"Do you wish me to go?" asked both men simultaneously.

Ashkita wrung her hands in despair.

"We are both ready!" said Thornton calmly. "Choose between us! Send to his doom the one you love less, and let the other enjoy bliss with you! It is for you to choose! The one whom you do not love well enough to marry had better die, for life would be worse than death without you, and he will at least be doing you a last service."

Nakamurah Iyayogo bowed his head in agreement with Thornton's words.

"Choose!" he said simply. "We are ready! It will prove our love!"

It was a terrible dilemma for Ashkita; in her extremity she could not decide, for it seemed to her that she loved both! Yet she must propitiate the gods—it was necessary! The fate of both brave men depended on her answer. Whom would she choose?

Both men watched her with that awful mingling of hope and anxiety that fills the heart of men who are waiting to hear a verdict that will send them to death or release them to live a life of happiness; yet there was a sentiment of rivalry even to be sent on a fatal errand, and an observer might have been inclined to think, from the attitude of the men, that they were about to fight for the privilege!

Ashkita seemed for a moment to lean towards Thornton, and the men listened for her words; was it to ask him to go or stay?

"It is hard for me to decide!" she cried. "Yet," she placed her hand on Thornton's arm, "I must send Nakamurah!"

Iyayogo started in spite of himself; he had expected, from her last movement, that she was about to send Thornton gently to his death and give herself up to the love of her own countryman; and now——

"Be it so!" he said, resigning himself with a great effort and presenting a stoical demeanour. Even although he had lost faith in the old superstition, yet he loved this girl so deeply that he would die for her, as he had said. "I will go! Success to Japan, and happiness to you both!"

Thornton involuntarily stretched out his hand, and the two men exchanged a firm grip. Then Captain Nakamurah Iyayogo turned on his heel, and with a low bow to Ashkita, went forth to meet his fate!

"I have sent him to his death!" she cried, bursting into tears. And she sank into the arms of Ralph Thornton!

Ralph caressed her and tried to soothe her, but it was quite two hours later when he was able to leave her; Ashkita's eyes were red with weeping, and her face appeared to have assumed a fixed cast of melancholy.

He was in a whirl as he returned to his own lodgings in the house of Hosaki. It was weird, terribly weird! It was foolish superstition and a man had been sent to his doom to gratify it! Yet it was hardly that; it was that a man had gone willingly to his death to prove his love for a woman!

"It requires more pluck to do that than to win the V.C. in the excitement of battle!" muttered Thornton. "And, by Jove, I envy him the chance of showing his grit!"

Three days passed, and Thornton could not see Ashkita; he wished to ask her to accompany him, for he was leaving Japan, and to be his wife in fulfilment of her promise, but it appeared like gloating over his friend's untimely end. And then there came reluctantly into his mind the thought that Ashkita was sorry for her choice! That uncontrollable fit of weeping! Had she, like other women, discovered the real state of her feelings by the revealing agency of loss?

He gained admission to her this time, and the red eyes, indicative of recent weeping, confirmed his suspicions. His heart seemed to turn to stone. She loved Iyayogo, and he was dead.

"Ashkita," he said tenderly, "you loved him better than me; you were mistaken?"

"Yes!" she cried. "And I killed him!"

"I wish I could take his place," said Thornton, and he meant it. "Perhaps he can be saved!" he cried, a moment later. "I will use every effort!"

She shook her head sadly, but he hurried from the room and into the street. Hosaki would help! He hastened to his lodgings and burst unceremoniously into the apartment where Hosaki was talking. Hosaki and his visitor turned as he entered, and Thornton uttered a cry. It was Iyayogo!

Safe! He had accomplished the strange mission and had escaped as by a miracle!

"She wants you!" said Thornton, seizing his hand and pushing him to the door. "Go to her and make her happy. I am so glad!"—and, as Iyayogo left the house with all speed, the sailor said, with a curious lump in his throat—"And I am so sorry!"

He left Tokyo the next day, and joined his ship on the China station, but his fellow-officers wondered what had happened to the light-hearted Ralph Thornton. **Geo. Day.**

Digitized by Google

LIGHT OUT OF DARKNESS.

Being the Love Story of Owen Merritt.

"By-the-way, Maria, I met Owen Merritt in the street to-day. It's the first time I've seen him since he got back from the Continent. I invited him down for a week or two," said Mr. Frank Mallory to his wife, one evening in early September.

"Ah! I'm glad you did," was the quick response.

The same thought seemed to be present in the minds of both husband and wife as their eyes met. Mr. Mallory was the first to give it utterance.

"Merritt's a fine fellow," he said; "rich, too, and got a splendid practice besides. Louise couldn't do better."

"Did he say he would come?"

"Yes; he will come home with me to dinner. Now, Maria, you must do your level best to bring about a match between him and Louise."

"Trust me for that," replied the lady, laughing. "You say I am a born matchmaker. But"—she added curiously—"why are you so anxious about it?"

"Oh, I've reasons. Never mind just now; I'll tell you some other time. I must be off."

Mr. Frank Mallory was a prosperous merchant—so people said—doing business in the City, and living for eight or nine months of the year in a beautiful country seat in Norfolk The balance of the twelve was usually spent in London in a fashionable hotel, where his wife and daughter were free to indulge in all the gaieties of town which lie within the possibilities of the purses of prosperous men.

Meantime the estate in Norfolk was left in the care of the servants, who were presided over by a niece of the gentleman, who had "generously" taken her into his family on the death of her father, when she was but eight years old, and given her a home.

But wherein the generosity consisted it would have been hard to tell, as she was really only an upper servant and nursery governess to his little deformed son, whose affliction was the great disappointment of his life. It might have been in the privilege of sharing Louise's lessons, including music, French, and German, which they were in a measure necessitated to allow her, since Louise resolutely declined to study alone; and equally, perhaps, in the privilege of wearing that young lady's cast-off clothes, the two girls being nearly of an age and size.

Louise Mallory was quite a belle in the circle in which she moved. Rather above the medium height, with a well-rounded, graceful figure, an abundance of glossy black hair, which she wore according to the latest vagaries of fashion—each new style seeming more becoming than the last had been—a clear, olive complexion, touched with a brilliant crimson in cheeks and lips, and a pair of flashing black eyes with long, curling lashes, completed the list of her personal charms.

In conversation she was bright and witty, quick at repartee, and generally the life of any circle in which she chanced to find herself. It is not wonderful, therefore, that the possessor of so many charms should have many admirers, but somehow or other it happened that she had passed her twentieth birthday without having her beautiful hand ornamented by an engagement ring, much to the vexation of her scheming mamma.

"I don't see how it is," observed that lady to her husband in a provoked tone one day; "I thought Louise had De Barry at her feet, and here invitations are out for his wedding with that Laura Stone! She isn't to be named in the same day with Louise. He's worth a million, too, they say. I declare, it's too bad!"

"Louise will overstay her market if she isn't careful," remarked Mr. Mallory sententiously.

"She's had plenty of offers. Harris, Longcope, Milliman, and that young Smythe have all proposed. But they're all too poor. Louise has got too much sense to fall in love with a poor man. I really think, though, that she had a fancy for Smythe; but I nipped that in the bud."

"I don't think you did a nice thing, then. Smythe is a rising man, and will some day come out on top in his profession, just mark my words," said Mr. Mallory warmly.

"That may be, I don't dispute it," replied his wife coolly; "but he's poor now, and I prefer Louise should marry a man who has a fortune in hand rather than one in the bush."

This conversation had taken place just previous to their flitting back to their country home, which they always did at the beginning of Lent, thus balancing the account of their gay, worldly life by a strict, religious observance of the forty days of fasting.

Shortly before this flitting a new star had arisen on their social horizon in the person of Owen Merritt, a young and wealthy lawyer, who had opened an office in the City.

Mrs. Mallory hailed the advent of this new "catch" with secret delight, and immediately set to work to weave about her unwary prey a silken web, which she meant should prove strong enough to bring him a willing captive to her daughter's feet.

Before much headway could be made in this direction, however, the time for their return to their country home had arrived. But she did not allow this rather unfortunate circumstance to interfere with her plans, and enlisting her husband in a good work, contrived to carry on the campaign, though, naturally, at a considerable disadvantage.

During the early summer, garden-parties, picnics, and fishing parties innumerable had been arranged, to all of which Mr. Merritt had received pressing invitations, some of

Digitized by Google

which he had accepted, and had, as she fondly hoped, been quite impressed with Louise's many attractions.

But in the latter part of July he rather unceremoniously dashed cold water upon her hopes by suddenly and unexpectedly running off to the Continent. However, he was now safely back, and with renewed vigour she prepared to resume the siege.

Louise, herself, to her mother's great displeasure, seemed quite indifferent, and declined to put forth any effort to secure the prize held up before her in such a tempting light, which her mother actually feared was owing to a lingering attachment for "that young Smythe," and she forthwith set herself to eradicate it, root and branch.

Louise, however, had taken the surest way, intentionally or otherwise, to attract Owen Merritt. He had had more than one young lady "throw herself at his head," and had become quite accustomed to the arts of designing mammas.

He saw through Mrs. Mallory's clever little ruses to get him and Louise together with a feeling of amusement, but that young lady's air of cool indifference piqued his vanity, and when he accepted the invitation for a fortnight's visit he mentally resolved to captivate Louise.

In this he had no wicked design, for Owen Merritt was not in any sense of the word a flirt. He honestly admired Louise Mallory's beauty and wit, and was in that susceptible state when admiration might easily develop into love, and might as easily, also, be turned into disgust and loathing. He was no greenhorn, either, and having reached the mature age of thirty years, concluded that if ever he meant to settle down in life, now was a very good time.

"Ring the bell for Mary, Louise."

Two, three minutes passed, and the summons was still unanswered.

A frown, black and ominous, gathered on Mrs. Mallory's brow, but remembering that a lady should always maintain her composure, no matter what domestic complications may arise, she merely motioned to Louise to repeat the signal, which that young lady did with considerably more energy than she had used the first time. A moment after a young girl hastily entered the room.

"I beg your pardon, aunt. I heard the bell the first time, but Ernie had accidentally set fire to some paper on the carpet, and I had to stop to put it out."

Mr. Merritt, who was engaged in conversation with his host, looked up in surprise, just in time to catch an angry glance at the speaker from Louise's superb eyes, while a deep flush rose to Mrs. Mallory's sallow cheeks.

"Explanations are not necessary," she said coldly. "Attend to your duties."

Tears sprang to the girl's eyes at the tone, and Mr. Merritt, who could not forbear a second glance, saw that only a resolute will was keeping them in check, as she quickly and deftly performed the duties for which she had been summoned.

He had never seen the girl before, and would not have done so to-day, had it not been for the sudden indisposition of the servant whose place she was required to take, for it was part o Mrs. Mallory's tactics to keep her entirely in the background not wishing her guests to know of the existence of a "poor relation" in her elegantly-appointed establishment.

As he looked up, she had paused for a moment behind Louise's chair, and he could not help being struck by the contrast between them.

They were apparently about the same age and size, but Mary's figure had a lithe suppleness about it that Louise's lacked, and her carriage was perfectly natural and graceful.

Her features were rather large and irregular, but she had a clear, white complexion, large, dark, hazel-grey eyes, with long, curling lashes, and a magnificent mass of rich, dark, auburn hair, which was drawn as plainly back as its wavy nature would allow from the low, broad forehead, and wound in a loose coil at the back of her shapely head.

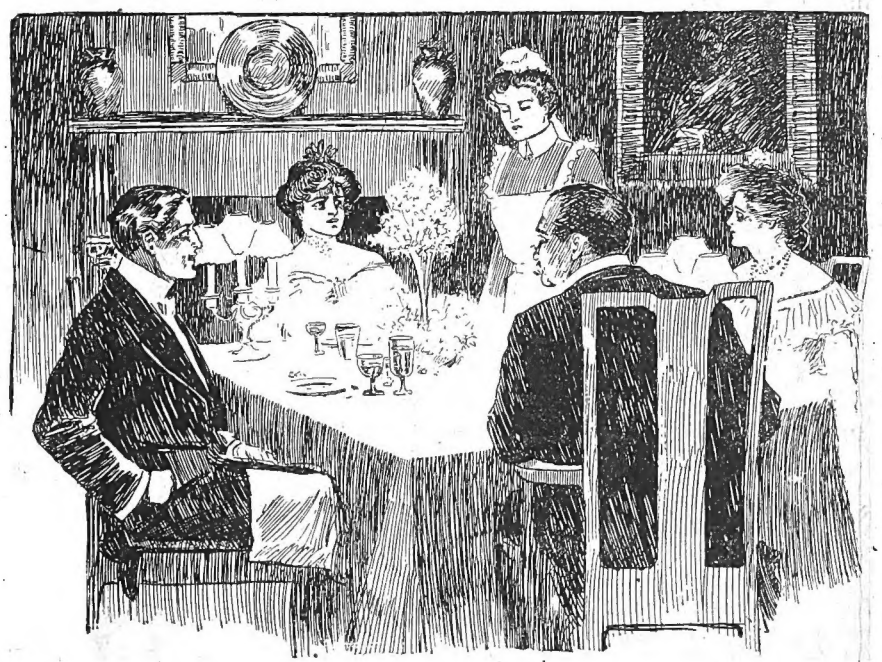
The contrast in their dress was equally striking.

Louise was attired in a robe of cream white cashmere, the low corsage filled in with rare old lace, while diamonds sparkled in her ears, and on her hands and arms. Mary, on the contrary, wore a neatly-fitting plain dress and white apron, with a simple linen collar fastened by a small gold pin, her only ornament. As she deftly plied the crumb-brush, he noticed that her hands were small and well shaped, and her wrists were as white and as beautifully rounded as Louise's own.

She did not once look at him, and although her brightened colour showed that she deeply felt the humiliation of being reminded of her inferior position in the presence of a stranger, she performed her menial duties with a quiet dignity that excited his admiration.

After dinner was over, and they had returned to the drawing-room, Mrs. Mallory seized the first opportunity which presented itself to make an explanation.

"Mr. Merritt," she said, "you must have been surprised to hear one of the servants address me so familiarly. The truth is we took her when she was a child, and brought her up in our family, and I very foolishly allowed her to call me



Owen Merritt looked up just in time to see Louise flash an angry glance at the maid.

Digitized by Google

'aunt.' I have told her that she must not do it now, for it is rather embarrassing to be addressed as aunt by one's servant."

Mr. Merritt made some light reply, and Mrs. Mallory, seeing a shade of displeasure on her husband's face, hastened to change the conversation, and proposed a stroll along the river. The others assenting, she and her husband led the way, but pretty soon she pleaded fatigue and turned back, and as Mr. Mallory could do no less than accompany her, Mr. Merritt and Louise were left to continue the walk by themselves.

"They must 'make hay while the sun shines,'" Mrs. Mallory said, as soon as they were out of hearing of the young people. "Next week the Ewings will be here, and then there will be an end to *tête-à-tête* walks. I want to get in as much of that kind of work as I can—I have to manage it all myself," she added grumblingly. "Louise seems perfectly indifferent, and won't help me a bit."

"It's the best plan she could take with a fellow like Merritt," observed her husband. "Let her alone and she'll make better headway than you will with all your planning and contriving. If he should see that she was aiming to catch him, he'd be off like a shot."

Somewhat comforted by this view of the situation, his wife went in search of Mary, to whom she proposed to read a lecture. She found her in the nursery singing Ernie to sleep. The poor little cripple, who was ten years old, though he did not look more than five, clung to Mary with a tenacity of affection pitiful to see, for it spoke eloquently of neglect on the part of the father and mother, who should naturally have had the first place in his heart.

Waiting out of sight of the child, until she saw the white eyelids close over the large blue eyes, Mrs. Mallory motioned to Mary to step into the next room, and then seating herself in state, while Mary stood like a culprit before her, began severely:

"I was astonished and mortified at dinner to-day, that you should forget what I have so often told you, that you must not address me as 'aunt' in the presence of visitors. As it seems that you cannot remember, it will be better for you to drop the title altogether. So, after this you will simply address me as Mrs. Mallory."

For a minute or two Mary could not speak. Then she said with what calmness she could command:

"I wish you would tell me, aunt—Mrs. Mallory—why there has always been such a difference made between us. My mother was Uncle Frank's own sister, and of course Louise and Ernie are my own cousins, yet I am made to occupy the place of a servant in the family where I should be an equal."

For some minutes Mrs. Mallory sat speechless with indignation, then recovering the use of her tongue, she exclaimed:

"You ungrateful minx! Haven't we given you a home all these years—and an education? You want to live like a lady, do you, while your uncle supports you?"

"I do not find any fault with the work I have to do," replied Mary quietly; "it is not difficult, and I would rather earn what I get under your roof, but I am not willing to be treated as if I were inferior to my cousins, when my blood is as good as theirs."

"You don't know what you are talking about!" cried the lady excitedly. "If you are not satisfied here you will have to find some other home. I shall tell your uncle of this!" she added, and she swept angrily from the room, leaving poor Mary almost broken-hearted; for in spite of the many hardships she had to undergo it was her home, and she could not bear to think of being obliged to leave it; for that they would send her away she had no doubt.

The week had nearly passed; it was now Friday, and Mrs. Mallory could not see that any headway had been made towards the fulfilment of her cherished plans. Louise appeared to be as nonchalant as ever, and she could not discover that Mr. Merritt was any more lover-like than he had been at first. He was an enthusiastic sportsman, and the greater part of the days had been spent in roaming over the adjacent fields and meadows with his host in search of game, and they were usually successful in bringing home full bags.

She had contrived that the young people should spend the evenings together in rides or drives or rows upon the river.

Next week the house would be full of company—among them several young men—and Louise, as hostess, could not, of course, bestow her company exclusively upon any one of her guests. If the desired result could not be brought about before then, it was not likely it would be at all, and she was beginning to feel quite disheartened. If she could have looked beneath the surface into the two young hearts she would have taken courage.

Mr. Merritt, who had been gradually becoming more and more captivated by Louise's beauty and wit, had quite made up his mind that the time had come for him to speak, and had determined to do so that very evening.

Not that he was very deeply in love. Indeed, he had come to fancy that he was past the age to feel "a lover's sweet pangs," and that the most ardent feeling he should probably ever have for any woman was calm appreciation.

He admired Louise intensely. She was beautiful, accomplished, witty, and for aught he had seen to the contrary, amiable in disposition; while in point of wealth and social station she was fully his equal. He could see no reason, therefore, why they should not be happy together, in that friendly, matter-of-fact sort of way that seemed to characterise the relations between most of the married people of his acquaintance.

Her careless, indifferent manner did not trouble him in the least now that he had become better acquainted with her. It was her way, and—well, he did not care for honey and sugar; too much of either was sickening. He liked her better so than if she had been more demonstrative.

As to Louise, she hardly knew what her feelings on the subject were. Whatever it was in her moral anatomy that took the place of a heart belonged to Mr. Smythe; but Mr. Smythe was poor. He would have to fight his way in the world, and although she did not doubt that he would ultimately win both wealth and fame, she did not feel inclined to help him fight; her nature was too ease-loving.

Mr. Merritt, on the contrary, had both wealth and station to place at her command; and her mother had so ceaselessly dinned into her ears the advantages of such an alliance, that she had at last resolved to say "Yes," whenever he should ask her to become his wife, which of course he would do sooner or later, for Miss Louise had been taught to believe that her charms were irresistible.

So it happened that the thoughts—hopeful or otherwise—of the whole quartette were turned towards that fateful Friday evening, when the young people were to go out for a row upon the river after the moon had risen.

At eight o'clock that evening Owen Merritt sat alone upon the balcony waiting for Louise, who had gone indoors for her wraps. The moon was just rising above the tree-tops on the opposite side of the river, and throwing her silvery beams athwart the rippling water. The day had been rather sultry, which made the cool, balmy evening breeze seem very refreshing. The long French windows stood open to admit as much of it as possible to the heated air within the house.

Close to one of these windows Mr. Merritt sat, swinging slowly backwards and forwards in a low rocking-chair and thinking earnestly. The seriousness of the step he was about to take impressed him deeply, involving as it did the weal or woe of himself and Louise for the remainder of their lives, when his reverie was suddenly and abruptly broken in upon by voices almost in his ear.

It was Mr. and Mrs. Mallory, and they appeared to be continuing a conversation begun elsewhere, for the first sentence from Mr. Mallory was:

"Well, if they don't, there'll be a pretty kettle of fish. Mary will be of age in less than three months, and then that fellow, Gibbs, will insist on settling up the estate, of course, as he is joint trustee with me of her property. If it wasn't for him she need never know anything about it, for she was too

Digitized by Google

young when her father died to know that he left her any money."

Not wishing to play the part of an eavesdropper, Mr. Merritt was about to make his presence known, when the next sentence transfixed him. It was from Mrs. Mallory, and was spoken irritably. "I don't see," she said, "what that has to do with Louise and Merritt."

"Well, you will see presently. The arrangement was that, I being her uncle, Mary was to be brought up with my children, and I was to have the use of her money, paying interest for it, of course. Well, the fact of it is that I speculated with it and lost every penny, and to-day I'm virtually a bankrupt. Now, Merritt's got pots of money, and, if he marries Louise, he would rather help me out than have the scandal it would occasion if it were known. I can manage to keep myself afloat till then, and meantime I shall have to throw myself on Mary's mercy, and get her to satisfy Gibbs, or he'll prosecute me as sure as can be."

"Well, do leave the interesting *dénouement* until we get Louise off our hands," said his wife irritably. "No doubt that ungrateful minx will want to turn us out of house and home!"

"It's precious little she has to be grateful for!" said Mr. Mallory, rather bitterly. "I tell you, Maria, you have carried things with too high a hand in that matter. I don't see what you were thinking of. My conscience pricks me that I've allowed it to be done!" he added in a lower tone.

Owen Merritt had heard enough of these miserable confidences, and, rising quietly, he stepped away noiselessly, feeling utterly disgusted and indignant, yet thankful, though, that he had escaped, though so narrowly, being made the tool of a knave, and having his bright, fair name tarnished by such an alliance.

Presently Louise, with a soft, white wrapper thrown over her hair, and a shawl over her arm, came to the door.

"Is Mr. Merritt here?" she asked, for they had not yet rung for lights, and the room was in shadow.

"Why, I thought you'd gone long ago!" exclaimed her mother. "Merritt!" said her father in a startled tone, and stepping hastily to the window, adding immediately in a tone of relief, "Oh, there he is, in the rose walk!"

He stood watching them till they disappeared from his view, and then, stepping on to the balcony, paced thoughtfully up and down its length.

Louise could not understand her companion at all that evening. The revulsion of feeling had been so great that it was utterly impossible for him to keep up the light, bantering conversation such as he had been wont to indulge in when in her company, more for the sake of hearing her bright, quick repartees, than because he considered her incapable of more profound trains of thought, and he was so very distrait, that finally she became silent, and the walk from which both had anticipated such pleasing results, ended with a feeling of coolness and constraint for which Louise, at least, was utterly at a loss to account.

When they reached the house after an almost entirely silent walk, Mr. Merritt informed her that he had quite unexpectedly discovered that it was imperatively necessary for him to return to town by the early morning train, which being the case, he would leave his apologies for his hasty departure with her, and would now bid her *adieu*, as he should probably be gone before they were up, whereupon *adieux* were coldly exchanged, and each retired to their respective rooms, though not to sleep.

Louise immediately extinguished her light and sat down by the open window, through which the glorious moon was pouring her beams. Scarcely had she done so when there came a knock at her door, and without waiting for an answer her mother entered. She had been awaiting their return with almost feverish anxiety, hoping to hear that her fond expectations were at last realised, and had been considerably surprised and mystified by their early separation, for it was not much after ten o'clock.

Louise looked up coldly and inquiringly as her mother came and stood beside her, not daring to ask what she so much wanted to know.

"Haven't you anything to tell me?" she asked at length.

"Nothing in particular—why do you ask?" replied Louise, indifferently.

Poor Mrs. Mallory! Her high hopes were dashed in an instant.

"Where's Mr. Merritt?" she asked despairingly.

"In his room, I suppose. He said he must retire early, as he is obliged to take the early train to town, and you know that leaves at a quarter past five o'clock."

"Is he coming back to-morrow evening?" almost gasped her mother, awaiting the answer breathlessly.

"No. He said that unforeseen circumstances obliged him to cut his visit shorter than he intended, and he left his apologies to you for going so unceremoniously."

"And he has not asked you to be his wife?"

"Mother!" said Louise, suddenly facing round and confronting her mother with flashing eyes and flaming cheeks; "you have made a perfect fool of yourself—and me! I am sure that Mr. Merritt must have seen what you were plotting—you have made it plain enough. Now I give you fair warning that after this I shall manage my own love affairs without your assistance."

Mrs. Mallory broke down utterly at this, and sinking down upon the carpet at her daughter's feet, hid her face in her hands, too miserable to weep.

"You don't know what you are talking about," she said, in a dull, muffled voice.

"What do you mean?" asked Louise, startled and somewhat frightened at her mother's manner.

"I mean this," said Mrs. Mallory, removing her hands from her face, and speaking in deep, tragic tones; "I wanted to bring about your marriage with Mr. Merritt to save us all from disgrace and poverty!

"Disgrace and poverty!" repeated Louise, bewildered.

"Yes. Do you know that we are beggars? Your father has speculated and lost everything—*everything*; and worse than all, he has lost Mary's money, too; and in a few weeks she will be twenty-one, and he will be called upon to settle up his accounts with Mr. Gibbs, the other trustee, and then it will all have to come out."

For some minutes Louise sat aghast. "I never knew that Mary had any money," she said at length.

"Yes, she had. Her father left her a large sum, and your father was appointed her guardian and joint trustee with Mr. Gibbs of the estate. This house belongs to her—or did. Of course we can't expect any mercy from her. She will be too glad of the opportunity of paying us out for making a servant of her in her own house; and there is nothing before us but ruin and disgrace." With this Mrs. Mallory got up and left the room.

For a long time Louise sat as if stupefied. The magnitude of the misfortune that had overtaken them seemed to crush out all power of thought. At length when the gong of the hall clock struck the hour of two, she rose, and, chilled and shivering, crept miserably into bed without undressing.

Digitized by Google

When Mrs. Mallory returned to her own room after her visit to Louise, her husband started feverishly up and uttered the single monosyllable: "Well?"

"We built our castles in the air," was the expressive reply.

With a groan he sank back upon his pillow, and uttered not another word.

* * * * *

The weeks passed on, slowly to some, but to others, who were trembling with "a certain looking for of judgment," they seemed to flash by with lightning speed. One morning, in the latter part of October, the social and business circles of London were shocked by the following announcement in large head-lines in the daily morning newspapers:

DISAPPEARANCE AND SUICIDE.

Three days ago the beautiful daughter of one of our wealthiest and best known merchants, Mr. Frank Mallory, suddenly and mysteriously disappeared from her home, leaving no clue to her whereabouts. Yesterday morning the body of her father was found by one of the servants lying on the floor of the library in his beautiful country residence in Norfolk, with the blood oozing from an ugly hole near his left temple, while one hand tightly grasped a small revolver. He was breathing faintly when found, but died before a physician could be summoned. It is supposed that grief over the disappearance of his daughter, who was well known and much admired for her beauty and wit in social circles, was the cause of the rash act. His wife is prostrated with grief over her double bereavement, and is lying dangerously ill at her residence.

Of the hundreds who read this paragraph, one only understood its real significance. Owen Merritt's cheek blanched, and his blood curdled with horror as he perused it. "He could face death easier than disgrace," he muttered to himself. "Poor Louise! the sins of her parents have no doubt driven her to destruction. What has become of the poor girl, I wonder?"

Two weeks later the announcement of Mrs. Mallory's death followed. There was the usual nine days' talk, and then the waves of oblivion rolled over them. "Their dear friends," pausing to utter a sigh of pity, rushed on as madly as before in the pursuit of the butterfly of pleasure.

It was a cold, blustering day in November Owen Merritt was sitting at his desk in his private office, busily engaged in preparing briefs for a case which he was to plead the next day in court, when a knock was heard at the door, and a clerk put his head in with the announcement:

"There's a lady here to see you, sir, in answer to your advertisement."

"Show her in here," said the busy lawyer, without raising his head. "Take a seat, madam; I'll be at liberty in a moment," he said as she entered, still busily scratching away.

Several moments passed. Then he laid down his pen, sat back in his chair and looked at his visitor. As he did so he was very nearly guilty of the rudeness of uttering a prolonged whistle.

The lady before him was attired in deep mourning, which showed to advantage the clear, white complexion without a trace of colour except in the lips, which were full and red, but the lovely, rich auburn hair quite supplied that lack, and its glittering waves made a beautiful framework for a face the principal charm of which was a pair of dark grey eyes, which were now looking straight into his with an almost pleading expression in their steady gaze.

He recognised her instantly, but as it was evident that she did not know him, he suppressed any sign of recognition, and, assuming his usual business tone, he said:

"You called in answer to my advertisement for a typine?"

"Yes, sir," she replied with dignified simplicity and straightforwardness; "I would like to have the employment, as I need it very much."

"I have no doubt you will suit me," he said with rather reckless haste, which caused her to look at him in some surprise.

"Have you ever done this kind of work?" he asked, more because he saw that some formalities were expected of him, than because he cared to know, for he had decided that she should have the place, competent or not.

"Only occasionally—for my uncle," she replied rather hesitatingly.

"Ah!—was your uncle a lawyer?"

"No, sir, he was a merchant." A painful flush flamed into the white cheeks at these questions, and Mr. Merritt did not pursue his investigations any further, but muttering to himself, "The villain!" proceeded to arrange the details of their business relations, naming a sum as compensation for her services which was considerably above the usual rates, and was rewarded for his generosity by a look of gratitude from the beautiful dark eyes, that caused a warm spot to glow in his heart, when he thought of it, for hours afterwards.

"Oh," he said with sudden recollection, as he was about to bow her out, and smiling at the omission, "I have forgotten to ask your name."

The young lady laughed, a low musical laugh which quite charmed Mr. Merritt, who was rather fastidious on that point, and who would not have admired the veriest beauty if she had had a coarse voice and been guilty of the heinousness of a loud laugh.

"Stanley—Mary Stanley," was the answer.

"Your hours will be from ten to four," he said as he held the door open for her to pass out, "and I would like you to come to-morrow if possible."

"Certainly, I will come," she said, and with a graceful bow took her departure.

"Did you get it, Mary?" said a weak, childish voice as she entered a rather small back room in a dingy house in a still dingier back street.

"Yes, Ernie, dear," said the girl, quickly crossing over to a couch where, propped up with pillows and cushions, sat a small childish figure, and bending down she smoothed back the soft hair from the high, pale brow of the little deformed cousin, and kissed him tenderly. "Yes," she repeated brightly, "and I am to get enough money every week to keep us comfortably."

The boy laughed merrily, though it was a weak, pitiful little laugh. "That will be fine," he said.

"Yes. And, Ernie, do you know what I think we can do? You remember, don't you, dear, those two nice little rooms I told you about, that I saw when I was out 'house hunting,' but I could not afford to pay the rent, you know? Now, if you don't mind staying alone a little longer, I will go out and see if they are still to let; it's not very far from here."

"Of course I'll not mind, you dear good Mary," said the boy impulsively, throwing his arms round her neck and giving her an affectionate hug. "What would I do without you? You're both papa and mamma to me."

"Well, then, I'll go," said the girl, returning the hug; "and if I get them we'll move this afternoon, for I have to go to work to-morrow."

"I hope you can, it will be much nicer to have two rooms; for then, you see, when you're away, and I get tired of one, I can get on my crutches and go into the other, and it won't seem so long."

With a great throb of loving pity welling up in her heart for the poor little unfortunate, Mary settled his cushions more comfortably, kissed him very tenderly, and left him.

Six months passed rapidly away, and Mary Stanley still occupied a desk in the office of Owen Merritt. The shapely head, with its beautiful crown of auburn hair, seemed like a ray of sunlight in the rather dingy room, and was always the first thing that gentleman's eyes rested upon when he entered it. How much he would have missed it, if some morning he had come and found it absent, he never stopped to inquire. They had grown to be great friends; and yet he would no more have thought of using any familiarity towards her than if she had been the grandest lady of his acquaintance, so perfectly was she hedged about with maidenly dignity and reserve.

As Spring advanced, and the coming Summer sent in now and again an advance-guard to warn the denizens of the busy city of hot weather close at hand, he began to notice, with some anxiety, a careworn, troubled expression gradually

Digitized by Google

creeping into the fair, sweet face, until at last it seemed to have taken possession, and he racked his brains to devise some means of finding out what was troubling her.

"Why do I care so much?" he suddenly asked himself one day when he had been rendered really miserable by seeing, while surreptitiously watching her as she bent over her writing, two large tears splash down upon the page before her, over which she hastily laid a blotter in a frightened sort of way. There was but one answer which he could give to this question, for in an instant a veil seemed to be snatched away from before his mental vision, and he knew that he loved this girl with a pure, deep love, such as he never could possibly have felt for Louise Mallory.

His visitor was Mary Stanley.

Mary herself at last volunteered the information he was so anxious to gain. One afternoon, after putting her desk in order, which he noticed that she seemed to be doing in a lingering, pre-occupied sort of way, she approached his table.

"Mr. Merritt," she began, in a hesitating way, "do you think you can fill my place here by next week?"

She did not look at him—or she would have seen that he turned very pale—but pulled nervously at some pieces of paper she held in her hand, and scattered them in little bits on the floor, in a manner quite at variance with her usual quiet self-possession and neat ways.

"Are you going to leave me?" he asked, trying hard not to let the pain in his heart show itself in his voice.

"I shall be obliged to," she replied, speaking rapidly, feeling that she must get through quickly or she should break down. "The doctor says that Ernie must not remain in the City during the hot months, and that I had better take him to the seashore."

"Who is Ernie?" he asked, with some constraint in his tone.

"I forgot that you did not know him. He is my little crippled cousin. His father and mother are dead, and he has no one but me to care for him."

"Is he your uncle Mallory's son?" Mr. Merritt asked, in surprise.

It was Mary's turn to be surprised, and she raised her eyes for the first time and looked at him.

"How did you know?" she asked.

He was vexed at his own incautiousness, but thought it best to make an explanation. "I recognised you instantly," he added. Mary dropped her eyes again, and a faint colour stole into her cheeks.

"And you have been supporting the son of the man who robbed you, and allowed you to be so shamefully treated!" he exclaimed, with a thrill which she might have understood if she had but looked up, for all his heart was in the tender, admiring gaze he bent upon her.

"It was not Ernie's fault," she answered softly, "and he is all I have in the world."

If Owen Merritt could have followed the dictates of his own heart at that moment, he would have taken her in his arms and assured her that she was all the world to him, and that without her it would be a waste, howling wilderness, without a ray of sunlight.

"What are your plans for taking him to the seaside?" he asked, in a controlled, business tone.

"My landlady has a sister who keeps a large boarding-house at Bournemouth. She says she can get me a position to take charge of the linen-room, where I can have Ernie with me."

"Miss Stanley," said Mr. Merritt, after a few moments' silence, during which he had been considering the best way to approach what was beginning to seem a very delicate and difficult subject, "may I call upon you this evening? I would like to see your cousin. I had a little brother who was a cripple from infancy, but died when he was eight years old."

Mary could not withhold the desired permission, and promptly at the hour agreed upon Owen Merritt stood in her little "drawing-room," as she and Ernie playfully called it. The furniture was most of it old and faded, but a few handsome pieces, which she had saved from the wreck of her home, and a stand of choice plants with a bird-cage above it, gave it an air of elegance and refinement.

This call paved the way for another, and then another, in which he told Mary of his love, in a manly, straightforward manner, and asked her to be his wife, upon which, with some tears and many blushes, she confessed that her heart had been in his keeping for months, and that she had gladly availed herself of the excuse the doctor's advice in regard to Ernie offered, in the fear that she might, in some moment of weakness, betray her secret.

They were married quietly, and then they gave Ernie the benefit of a sea voyage, and took him to a German Spa.

Only after her marriage did Mary confide to her husband a secret known to but a few, the fate of poor Louise.

"A few days after her father's death her body had been found in a small cove, where the pleasure boats were moored. At first foul play was suspected, but there were no marks of violence, and I have no doubt she chose death rather than face the contempt of Society. Poor aunt was very ill, and I sent immediately for Mr. Gibbs. With great difficulty we succeeded in keeping an account of it out of the papers."

"Out of misery is happiness born," said her husband, drawing her fondly to him. "It was a sad, a terribly sad affair, but it has brought me the great happiness of my life."

George Barnes.

Digitized by Google

Exciting Series.

A Striking Series of Astonishing Revelations.

Told by the Decoy Herself.

OF WHOM YOU READ.

Vivienne D'Alton, the decoy. She, an innocent girl, unwittingly leads young gentlemen of good social standing to their ruin at the hands of the man she believes to be her father.

Beverley D'Alton, who poses as a millionaire who has made his money by judicious speculation. He assumes to lavish great affection on Vivienne.

Mrs. Sherwood. A florid person, who is introduced to Vivienne by her father as a great friend of her dead mother. She lives with the D'Altons, and requests Vivienne to call her "Aunt Flora," which the young girl reluctantly does.

Annchen. A lady's maid, whom Vivienne greatly detests. She seems to be on very familiar terms with Mrs. Sherwood and Mr. D'Alton.

ELEVENTH EPISODE.

A Friend in Need.

So strange an effect did Dr. Farnie's influence have upon me that I actually began to think that I must have been dreaming, and I was altogether in such a state of mental and physical collapse that I hardly remembered reaching home again.

In fact, I was ill. So ill that I had neither strength nor brains to do anything but lie down on my couch, and yield myself to the ministrations of Mrs. Sherwood and Annchen, who both quoted Dr. Farnie's orders.

I tried hard to collect my thoughts, so as to understand what had really happened. Was it true that my father had accused me of intending to elope? If so, how was it that he happened to know that I was in the seed shop? It was all very strange, and I felt so faint that I had willingly partaken of a restorative which Annchen solicitously pressed upon me.

But, somehow, the so-called restorative lacked the power to stimulate my brain into its wonted activity. On the contrary, I felt sleepy after it. And I also began to feel so tranquil that I made no effort to keep awake, for it was a delicious kind of drowsiness which possessed me, and under its influence every shadow of trouble seemed to vanish into the misty regions of the past.

"How is she doing?"

The question was uttered in a faint whisper by somebody within the room, and I knew that it referred to me. But my bodily powers were so held in thrall that not even the fluttering of an eyelid betrayed the fact that my senses were already recovering sufficiently to enable them to grasp the present again.

"She'll do beautifully. I've worked the oracle, and another dose will stop her meddling for ever."

It was Mrs. Sherwood who now spoke, almost in as low a whisper as the questioner, who was no other than my father.

"That's right. Whoever expected that she would turn out to be such a meddlesome little cat, and almost ruin everything by her peeping and prying?"

"Who expected? *I* expected. I've told you over and over again that she was not the right sort to hoodwink long."

"Well, I only intended it to last till we had got the settlements out of the Prince. They could both have gone the way of all flesh then."

"Well, you'll have to let the Prince slide. It's too risky to keep this game on. And, even if it wasn't, I'd stand it no longer. I was a fool to agree to play second fiddle to a chit of a girl. You could easily have pretended that you had married twice, and that I was the girl's step-mother. That would have saved me some of her insolence. But there is one thing to be thankful for—she'll give me no more of it."

"No. But I can't help thinking that it is a great pity. Why, she might have raked in millions for us, if she hadn't inherited the stupid prejudices of the D'Altons."

"Oh, well, it's no use crying over spilt milk. We may thank our stars that we have stopped her tongue in time, and that Kaspar had the sense to let you know that he was being shadowed by Lord Broomville."

"Yes, that was what saved the whole situation. I was only just in time with my bogus policemen, and nobody thought of interfering when they produced the sham warrant. Broomville has been a tough customer, but I think he won't trouble us again."

"He hadn't need! Fancy him discovering that Kaspar and Annchen Krause are both related to me, and that——"

"My patient. How is she?"

It was Dr. Farnie who thus broke in upon a conversation that filled me with nameless horror, which was all the greater because I was still utterly incapable of making a movement.

Clearly, my death was intended! And, this being so, I no longer tried to believe that Beverley D'Alton was my father. For, if he had been, how could he have plotted with my enemies against me? Besides, was not the father of my recol-

Digitized by Google

lection a very different man? And had I not been greatly disappointed at the alteration in his appearance?

In this manner my reasoning faculties were trying to keep pace with the conversation that was being carried on in my room, when Dr. Farnie inquired after me.

"She has fallen into a pleasant sleep now," was Mrs. Sherwood's gently spoken reply. "I hope, when she wakes again, she will behave more like a sane person."

"Your influence doesn't go for much," sneered my father. "You told me that you could hypnotise the girl into doing anything that I wanted her to do."

"And I induced her to consent to marry the Prince, whom you were so desirous of securing for a son-in-law."

"But you failed to keep her thoughts in the groove I wished them to be kept in, or she would not have been so ready to elope with the fellow who calls himself Viscount Broomville. And as you have not fulfilled your part of the contract, I shall mulct you in half the honorarium I promised you."

"I hardly think that you will do that, sir, for it would not conduce to your popularity if I were compelled to have recourse to the law to make you keep your promises. But why take it for granted that I am unable to recover lost ground? Let me try my powers again, and I will either succeed absolutely, or I will forfeit every farthing of my promised honorarium. Surely, that is a fair offer, sir?"

There was a moment's silence, broken at last by Mrs. Sherwood, who put in a protest against the hypnotist.

"I think we had better drop that nonsense altogether," she said firmly. "I won't allow dear Vivienne to be tampered with any more, for the sake of pandering either to your greed or her father's ambition. I shall take her to visit some friends of mine in Holland. They will soon restore her to bodily vigour, and with the return of health, she will begin to see that we have only her welfare at heart."

These words could not have sounded kinder if they had come from my dearest friend. But they filled me with more acute anguish of mind than ever, for only too well did I foretell the treatment which her friends in Holland would accord to me. Of course—at least, so I thought—she was alluding to Herr and Madame Althaus, whom I no longer hesitated to connect with the tragic death of poor Mr. Graysworthy.

Therefore, strange though it may seem, I was desperately anxious to be given over to the tender mercies of the hypnotist, rather than to be abandoned to the boasted solicitude of Mrs. Sherwood.

My father seemed to be thinking deeply. But when he spoke again, I was so wildly thankful, that I felt my hands twitch convulsively beneath the embroidered satin eiderdown which had been thrown over me, and this brought me face to face with a new discovery. The enthralment of my physical powers was waning, and I could now move if I liked. But it was all-important to me to appear as limp as I was believed to be, and I prayed wildly for the power to foil my enemies.

My success must have been almost as great as the mental effort which produced it, for not a muscle of my face moved, even though the next words I heard indicated a respite from the fate which Mrs. Sherwood had planned for me.

"Vivienne will be happiest if she lives to be a princess," said my father. "So there is no reason why her ultimate happiness should not be our chief consideration. I tell you what, Dr. Farnie, I'll accept your challenge. But I shall rely on your honour not to allow my daughter to hold communion with anybody else, or to leave this house except as the willing bride of Prince Gorouki."

"Very well, Mr. D'Alton; I give you my word of honour that Miss D'Alton will comply with her father's wishes in every respect. She shall not leave this house again without my permission, and I guarantee that she will go to the altar a willing and a happy bride. If I fail in any item of these promises, I absolve you entirely from your part of the contract, and you will easily understand, that I, being a poor man, will not forfeit ten thousand pounds if I can help it."

"Then it is a bargain, and we will leave you to your task."

"One moment, Mr. D'Alton. The fewer people there are about Miss D'Alton the better, until I have moulded her mind to the desired shape. I have noticed two maids are often in attendance upon her. Which of them does she like best?"

"Annchen is the most suitable maid for her, under the circumstances," answered Mrs. Sherwood. But the doctor insisted upon his question being carefully considered from his point of view.

"Certainly," was his bland response. "We will have Annchen if she is Miss D'Alton's favourite. If she is not, we must have the other, for I have too much at stake to risk losing the game by having disturbing influences to contend with."

"Then you shall have Susan here," decided my father, in spite of renewed protest by his accomplice, and all three left me for a while.

No sooner was I alone than I tried to piece into coherent form all that I had learnt. Dr. Farnie was to have £10,000, if he could hypnotise me into being dutiful enough to marry Prince Gorouki, and both the Prince and I were "to go the way of all flesh" as soon as Mr. D'Alton had secured the huge fortune which was to be settled upon me by my affianced husband.

It seemed to me that in any case I was doomed. For if I resisted all attempts to make me marry the Prince, Mrs. Sherwood's method of extinction would be used on me just the same.

But at present, in spite of the gravity of my situation, my greatest anxiety was on account of Lord Broomville, whose zeal on my behalf had resulted in his capture by the enemy. I trembled to think of the fate in store for him, and, no longer restrained by the necessity of keeping my emotions in check, I yielded to a fit of bitter weeping.

This lasted till I heard myself addressed in a gentle, compassionate voice, which caused me to sit up in the wild hope that it was really a friend who was speaking to me.

* * * * *

Alas! there was nobody here but Dr. Farnie and Susan, and I did not expect them to be of much use to either Lord Broomville or myself. But they were certainly not aggressive, and I could almost have fancied that neither of them was hypocritical.

But I had heard the doctor's compact with the man who might, or might not be, Beverley D'Alton, and I was not inclined to be too trustful.

"Miss D'Alton, pull yourself together and listen to some good news," said the doctor, and once again I felt compelled to acknowledge his power to soothe me into comparative tranquillity.

"Good news?" I queried mournfully. "Do you think that it is good news to know that you intend to make me marry Prince Gorouki?"

"I intend to do no such thing," was the smiling reply, and my voice was as contemptuous as I could make it, as I retorted: "Dr. Farnie, if you think that you can hoodwink me, you are mistaken. I heard every word you and those wicked people said just now."

"Those wicked people? Do you mean your father and your aunt?"

"No. I mean the impostors who pretend to be my father and my aunt."

"By Jove! Pardon me, Miss Vivienne! But I am really so astonished at the extent of your information that I hardly know what to make of it."

"Then you do not deny that they are impostors?"

"On the contrary, I hope to help towards their exposure."

This was such an unexpected answer that I could hardly believe my ears, and I began to put several eager questions, all of which were, however, denied an answer just then.

"You must be fainting for want of nourishment," said the doctor, "so I want you to do justice to a meal which Susan will bring you."

"I'm not a bit hungry. I want neither food nor drink."

"My dear young lady, you cannot live on nothing."

"Neither could I live on the fare Mrs. Sherwood is likely to send me."

Digitized by Google

This answer was significant enough to show the depth of my distrust. But I was soon reassured.

"Susan," said the doctor, "go downstairs and fill a tray for Miss D'Alton. Select the things yourself, and do not, on any account, allow either Mrs. Sherwood or Annchen to come near the tray."

"I'll be very careful, doctor," promised Susan.

"And mind, not a word to betray what I have said to you."

"I'm too fond of Miss Vivienne to bungle. You may trust me to help to save her."

This little conversation almost completed the growing conviction that I had some friends on my side, and while Susan was away, my doubts on the point were entirely set at rest.

"I daresay you are wondering which of my promises are intended to be kept," began the doctor, and I instantly retorted: "I heard you give your solemn word of honour that you would make me comply with Mr. D'Alton's wishes in every respect."

"Not exactly. What I said was this: 'I give you my word of honour that Miss D'Alton will comply with her *father's* wishes in every respect. She shall not leave this house again without my permission, and I guarantee that she will go to the altar a willing and a happy bride."

"Well?"

"I shall not forfeit my word of honour, I assure you. For, in the first place, the man to whom I pledged it is not your father. In the second place, you already have my permission to leave this house as soon as ever you and I have finished the task which still requires completion. In the third place, I was not thinking of Prince Gorouki as your future husband, but of a dear friend of my own, who lost his heart to you the first moment he saw you, and who is responsible for my presence here. Can you guess whom I mean?"

I felt myself flush scarlet, for I knew that he meant Viscount Broomville, and I should have been wild with joy if the latter had not been in grave danger.

"Oh!" I ejaculated, "he will be killed! He has been arrested. But they were sham policemen, and the warrant was a forged one! Those awful people will never let him escape again!"

"Oh, yes, they will, for they cannot help themselves. This business has been a case of diamond cut diamond all through, and Broomville could not be spirited away without his friends knowing exactly where he was. There has been no money spared, and there are several men constantly watching Broomville. Wherever he is taken, they will follow, and you need not be uneasy on his account, even though I appeared to be working against him."

"And did he ask you to come here?"

"Yes. After several attempts had been made on his life, he determined to obliterate himself for a time, and discover the source of his danger. He saw the man you christened the 'Bird of Evil Omen' talking to your maid Annchen, and he then pursued his investigations so ardently that the whole castle of cards will soon fall round the ears of the so-called Mr. D'Alton and his wife."

"His wife?"

"Yes, she is his wife, and, if possible, she is more wicked than he is."

"She is awful! She has a book on poisons, and she managed to give me a dose. That was how I was so helpless and stupid for awhile. But I heard every word that was said while I was lying here, and I know that she intended to kill me."

"I know that, too, for you were too keen of intellect to be a mere careless tool. The post of decoy should be given to a really wicked woman, who has neither heart nor conscience. Unfortunately for this colossal scheme of swindling, you have both a heart and a conscience."

"Ah! What is that?"

There was a slight rattle at my outer door, and Doctor Farnie smiled reassuringly.

"It is only Susan with your lunch," he said. "I took the precaution of turning the key after her, to guard against surprises."

And there was need of caution, for Susan had surprised Annchen so intent upon trying to listen at the keyhole, that she had not time to get away before she was observed. Happily, we were talking only in whispers, for each knew the desperate need of caution, and we were quite convinced that not a word of what he had said could be overheard.

"Keep a sharp look-out, Susan," enjoined Dr. Farnie. "Neither Annchen nor her mistress must be allowed to enter these rooms. But it will not do to arouse suspicion against me, so if any questions are asked you, you must say that Miss Vivienne is already quiet and cheerful. And tell Mr. D'Alton that everything is going on satisfactorily. He will know what you mean."

When Susan had gone again, I began to eat my lunch, for I felt the need of it, and, while I ate, Dr. Farnie answered more of the questions which I eagerly put to him.

One of these was put with a sudden doubt in my voice.

"After all," I said, "how do I know that you are not hypnotising me this minute into believing whatever you choose to tell me? It is what you are here for."

"I can quite understand your doubts, Miss D'Alton," was the grave reply. "But I swear to you that you are now in an absolutely normal state. I have experimented a good deal in hypnotism. But I am a failure as a perfect hypnotist, for I have been unable to influence you to the total exclusion of your own will. Broomville saw some of my experiments, and that gave him the idea of making me useful here. He thought that some kind of villainy was sure to be brought into play against you, and that it was just as well that one of the villains should be somebody who would really befool Mr. D'Alton into believing his plans to be progressing satisfactorily."

"One moment, Dr. Farnie. Is it quite certain that Mr. D'Alton is not my father?"

"The man who poses as your father is not in the least degree related to you. Nor is his wife."

"Then they had good reason to fear what Miss D'Alton could tell about them! And that is why they robbed the poor old lady of her memory! But we must lose no more time in restoring it. I will leave this house at once. She shall be cured this very day."

My words had a strange effect on Dr. Farnie. He almost gasped for breath, and looked at me in such an anxious way that I thought he must have been taken suddenly ill.

"You say that Miss D'Alton has been deliberately robbed of her memory?" he cried, "and that we must lose no time in restoring it? Are you speaking at random? Or are both statements true?"

"Perfectly true," I answered firmly. "The fiendish stuff which Mrs. Sherwood uses is described in her book of poisons, and I was actually buying the antidote for it when I was forcibly removed from the shop."

"Ah! That explains something I did not understand! But it also opens out such a possibility of joy as you have not yet dreamt of. I know somebody else whose memory is a blank, and if it can be restored, there will be no more mystery in either your life or his."

There was so solemn and significant a tone in Dr. Farnie's voice that a wild thought rushed into my mind.

"This other person whose memory is a blank," I panted—"has he aught to do with me? His name—tell me his name."

"Yes, I will tell you his name," was the triumphantly spoken answer. "His name is Beverley D'Alton, and he is your real father."

(Another instalment of this series will appear next week.)

HANDWRITING DENOTES YOUR CHARACTER.

And if you wish to learn what this is send a specimen of your handwriting, together with six penny stamps and a stamped addressed envelope, to RANEE, 23 Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C. A reliable delineation of your character will be sent in return.

Digitized by Google

The Mistake They Made.

Being the Love Story of Roberta Bond.

Dr. Bond found his eyes weakening, and discovered that he could no longer, even with glasses, place before the printer that fine "copy" for which he was renowned, and as his great work on the Mysteries of Science was not yet half-completed, he advertised for a "secretary," and from the long and seemingly never-ending train of men—young, old, well-dressed, and shabby—who, for two weeks, answered his advertisement—selected one, a delicate young fellow named Burnet, with a pretty rather than a handsome face, a coat that had done service, and boots that needed mending.

The secretary was to live in the house, and partake of the family meals; and Dr. Bond's selection, which was supposed to be based entirely on handwriting, was secretly biassed a little by the harmlessness of this young person.

Dr. Bond had been a widower for three years, and had two daughters, between whom their deceased mother's large fortune was divided equally.

He had desired to engage a foreign-looking professor, with wild hair, moustaches, and a great gift of speech, but bethought him that he would certainly make love to the girls.

A young man, who evidently thought himself like a portrait of Lord Byron, he rejected because he feared Bella might fall in love with him.

As for Roberta, it never occurred to him that she would, as he expressed it, make a fool of herself again. She was thirty years of age, had been "engaged" to somebody once, and they had quarrelled and parted, and Roberta had fallen ill, and it was not at all pleasant. He believed that Roberta would stay with him always, and take comfort in the independence her fortune gave her.

She was a handsome woman, and greatly admired, but it is to be doubted if her father knew it. But, at all events, this small, slim, light-haired secretary, with his retiring manner and solemn, owl-like eyes, would not be a bait for hearts.

So it proved when the secretary appeared at the dinner-table. He was so much alarmed when spoken to that Bella and Roberta, both large women with decided manners, and a strong sense of humour, looked at each other with glittering eyes.

"Oh, isn't he funny?" cried Bella, when once they were alone. "And how we frighten him! I felt like guying him. It's so absurd for a man to be like that. I hope he is not a girl, and will not turn out to have applied for the secretaryship to make love to poor papa, like the pretty pages in the old romances."

"Really, he is like a girl," said Roberta. "But he won't be at all in the way, and I can't think even you will flirt with him—which is a blessing."

However, Roberta was very much more motherly in her emotions than was Bella, and very shortly she began to pet young Burnet, as she might a boy on a visit home from school.

He was very grateful, very amiable, and returned her kindness in a thousand of those little ways that so please a woman. But whatever he did, wherever he was, the young man always seemed to be unhappy. Once or twice, when she came upon him suddenly, she saw tears in his blue eyes. It troubled her; she liked him so much. She longed to ask him what it was that troubled him. Perhaps he missed his home. It seemed strange to her that so gentle and easily-pleased a creature should have any secret woe to brood over. Still she could not guess what it was, until one day chance——But let us see what chance did.

Dr. Bond, like most literary men, hated to have his room "tidied up." Still there were periods when dust accumulated to such a depth on everything that his daughters and their servants raided the place in his absence, and, working in fear and trembling, did all that broom, and duster, and soap-and-water could do to the neglected study, which their father instantly set to work to throw into its old state again.

Such a day came. The rush was made. Bella and Roberta worked with the servants. At last all was fresh, bright, and purified, and Roberta lingered behind the others in the study to arrange some books more prettily on their shelves. Some of these she set on young Burnet's desk for a time, and in doing so her eye rested on the large sheet of blotting-paper that covered it. Certain words were reversed upon it.

Roberta looked, blushed, laughed a little; replaced the paper with a new sheet, and carried the marked one to her own room. There she held it before a mirror, and read these words: "Roberta—Roberta—Roberta," written over and over again. Then: "Oh, my Roberta! If I only dared! If I only dared!" And after this: "Never—never! Oh, poverty!"

Roberta folded the paper away in the recesses of a private drawer, and sat down trembling and excited, to think it all over. So this was the secret: he loved her—and, being poor, dared not tell her. Lovers always did these things. During the brief period of her engagement, did she not write her lover's name—Charles Lawrence—whenever she took a pen in her hand? And so it was *this*—*this*—and being this, she could make him happy, drive away his sorrow—she!

Sunk in the cushions of a great chair, she thought it all over until thinking was a pain. Charles Lawrence was the only man she could ever love—but she liked William Burnet. Perhaps she could come to like him well enough to marry him. To be loved, even if one cannot love, is something, and he would never know. She would try. She laughed as she rose to dress her hair and to arrange her costume for the evening; but she repeated—she would try.

She did honestly. And it makes ever so much difference in a true woman's feelings to any man to know that he loves her.

Time passed. Roberta really felt that there was much to like and respect in this young man. She encouraged him to cross the debatable land between friendship and love, but he still lingered on the margin. At last she took the first step.

They were alone one evening. He had come into the drawing-room to get a book, and she had asked him to sit down. His face was so sad, his manner so despondent, that, involuntarily, she drew nearer to him and put her hand on his arm.

"You are in trouble," she said.

He sighed.

"Can I help you?" she asked gently.

"No," he answered. "If I could become a rich man, that would help—nothing else; but I never shall be that. I have no energy, no talent, no physique. I—I wish I were dead."

He almost sobbed.

Digitized by Google

Roberta drew nearer.

"Coward!" she said softly.

"I believe I do deserve the name," he answered.

"You do," said Roberta, smiling. "Why should you fear to tell a woman you love her, because she is rich, and you are poor? You see, I know all."

She looked at him rather as a gallant cavalier might regard a loving maiden than with the gaze a woman gives her lover, and his pale, boyish face flushed, and his eyes filled again.

"I guessed," she said. "And then I saw the name you had written so often. I understood. You should not have been so doubtful of me."

Then William Burnet quite understood.

The instinct of a gentleman taught him what to do. Many a less bashful man would not have known, but he did.

He sank upon his knees at her feet and took her hands.

"You are so good—so kind!" he said. "You quite sympathise with us, I am sure. You are much my superior, and even hers, in every way. Her name is the same as yours—Roberta; and she is only seventeen. Not very pretty, but I love her so! But about being rich, you are mistaken. She is as poor as I—poorer—dependent on a miserable uncle. You know all now. Oh, how good you are! I am so glad you spoke of it to me."

But he knew—he knew, and he kept wondering at it all to himself as he went quietly out of the room, after Roberta had forced herself to say:

"I shall try to help you to find something better, so that you shall be able to marry my little namesake."

Afterwards she went through an awful struggle with self-contempt and shame, and could have beaten herself for her folly. She remained in the firelit room alone, and did not call for a lamp. She paced the floor, and seated herself only to rise again. She had trained herself to love this boyish, weak, helpless man for his sake, that she might be good to him, and out of gratitude for the secret love he felt for her; and here was a *dénouement*. He had never loved her at all. It was a silly little Roberta, with a foolish mouth and seventeen inexperienced years, for whose sake he bemoaned himself—a penniless girl, with no beauty, and she had almost offered herself to him.

The ringing of the bell startled her from a dark reverie. She fancied her father and sister had returned, and remained where she was; and the door opened, and a servant entered bringing a card, which the low fire-light did not enable her to read.

And someone had followed the girl—a large man with a beard—a presence grand and impressive—that seemed strange, yet familiar.

"Roberta," said a voice.

It came out of the midst of a never-forgotten past.

"Who speaks?" she cried.

Then she knew. It was Charles Lawrence. The servant brought the lamp in and retired.

They looked at each other.

"Roberta," he said, "I have come back again. Are you angry?"

She trembled so that she could not speak.

He took her hand.

"I deserved punishment," he said. "Heaven knows I have had it in this exile from you. Is it not proof enough that, after all these years, I return to ask for pardon? Can you not forgive one who repents so deeply?"

And then he told her the whole truth of a certain story, the warped version of which had parted them, and she blushed for her wrath and for her cruelty, and believed in him once again.

Clasped in his arms, and happy as a woman could be, Roberta remembered the scene of an hour before. What misery had been hers, had she received from William Burnet an avowal of love in reply to her words: "If he had really loved her, or, tempted by the bait of wealth, had said so."

A few days after this Roberta called young Burnet to her and told him, in quite a motherly manner, that the gentleman she should shortly marry could offer him a place which would enable him to marry his little lady-love. She was beaming with happiness as she spoke, and young Burnet was greatly puzzled.

"Of course I was a fool to think such an absurd thing," he often says to himself. "I fancied she thought I loved her, and even liked me, but it could not have been. I am so glad it was not."

He lives happily with his Roberta. The other Roberta thinks herself the most blissful woman under the sun; and all is well that ends well. **Stanley Hammond.**

A Word of Advice.

The second list of signatures in connection with our new competition appears on page 369, and I should advise all my readers to turn to it immediately and make up their minds to try for one of the splendid cash prizes that are offered. The first coupon was published in our last number, and the others will appear week by week. If you have not got last week's *Short Stories*, procure it at once, else you may experience some difficulty in getting a copy. It would be wise to tell your newsagent to send you this paper every week—at least, until the competition ceases. In this way you would make quite certain of having all the necessary competition numbers, and I trust that by that time you would have developed such a liking for the literary contents that you would continue to subscribe to it for their sake alone. Try it and see.

A New Serial.

"Dupes of Destiny," the fine serial written by Blanche Eardley, and which has been so popular, will be concluded very shortly. Readers have followed the story with keen interest, and many, no doubt, will be sorry to part with the characters. Still, all good things must have an end, and you have further compensation, insomuch that in its place an exciting new serial, written by Arnold Bennett, the well-known author, will commence. It will be a stirring tale of plot and power, of cunning and crime, of love and loyalty. One of the premier black-and-white artists of the day, Mr. Reginald Cleaver, will illustrate it with profuse sketches. Remember that this new serial will commence in the number of *Short Stories* dated April 2nd.

"The Heart of Claire Gilchrist."

The above is the title of the Tenth Unsolved Love Problem, which you will find on the opposite page.

I will award a prize of one guinea to the reader who sends in what I consider to be the best solution to the problem. Replies must not exceed one hundred words, and should be written on one side of the paper only. The last day on which I can receive replies will be Friday, March 25th. None arriving after that date will be considered. Address your envelopes to the Editor, *Short Stories*, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C. Mark the top left-hand corner "Tenth Love Problem." **Your Editor.**

Digitized by Google

UNSOLVED LOVE PROBLEMS.

A Prize of One Guinea is offered to the reader who sends in the most Satisfactory Solution to the Problem. Replies should not exceed one hundred words. See "Your Editor Chats."

No. X.—THE HEART OF CLAIRE GILCHRIST.

THROUGH the half-opened church door came the pealing notes of an organ, and the fair girl who stood without paused, for a few minutes, with her hand on the heavy latch.

She was a perfect Saxon type, such as has decided the type of English beauty for all time; tall and nobly proportioned, her skin exquisitely fair, and her eyes deep blue; while one might be forgiven for imagining that the gold of her hair lighted the gloom of the old porch. It was summer-time, and her dress, simple as it was, showed evidence of both wealth and taste. Her head was bare, for all her walk, except the churchyard path, had been through her father's property. She was Claire Gilchrist, daughter of Sir Mostyn Gilchrist, of Mellor Park.

As she stood listening in the doorway, loth to interrupt the player, the pealing notes were changed to sounds of poignant sweetness, that again melted into a minor key of infinite sadness. The ready tears that started to her eyes showed a nature sensitive to music, and then, as though unable to bear it any longer, she pushed open the door, and hastily twisting her lace scarf over her head, entered and moved swiftly up the aisle.

The church seemed almost in darkness save where the chancel windows flooded the pavement with many-coloured glories, and as she reached the chancel step the light fell upon her, and the player at the organ turned and saw her.

It was a grandly-shaped head that looked at her with deep, dark eyes into which, as they met hers, there leapt a strange flame, and the music changed its character.

Triumphant, passionate chords crashed out till Claire stood transfixed, feeling herself surrounded with a glowing passion of love; then they stopped abruptly, and she shivered at the sudden removal of the heavenly light and warmth that had enveloped her. She moved forward timidly, but at the same moment the organist rose, and, shutting the instrument, came towards her.

Then it was seen that he was lame and stunted in figure. The grand head, with the powerful though irregular features, seemed as if it should belong to another body, for his was thin and insignificant, almost shrunken, while a club foot caused a lameness painful to observe.

"Mr. Rhys," said Claire, "I have a request to make."

"Certainly, Miss Gilchrist, I am at your service; we will go outside," he replied, standing aside to let her pass before him down the quaint little village church.

Not a word was said as he locked the church door, and placed the ponderous key in his pocket. Claire still felt the glamour of the music, but could no more allude to it in spoken words than if it had been a veritable declaration of love, such as it sounded to her heart.

In the churchyard she led the way to a low wall under an old yew tree, and here she seated herself, and motioned to him to do likewise, but he preferred to stand, leaning against the tree, seeming wilfully to display all the disproportionateness of his figure.

Out in the open, away from the impressive gloom of the little old church and without the flood of passionate music or the compelling gaze of the fiery Celtic eyes, Claire was once more the "lady of the Manor," and Owen Rhys was the organist.

Now, however, she turned to him, and said, with the air of one asking a favour.

"It is my birthday next week, and I am going to have a garden-party. Will you come?"

"To play?" he asked.

"No," she replied—"as a guest."

"I never go out," was all his answer.

Claire was evidently accustomed to this abruptness, for she took no offence; she only said:

"Do come!"

He turned on her almost passionately.

"Why do you want to make me come where I know I shall only be out of place? I cannot talk, I am ill at ease away from my music, and I am not the latest London furore that I might fatuously imagine I did these ladies and gentlemen sufficient honour in allowing them to breathe the same air with me. I am only the lame organist of Mellor parish church."

"That is your own choice—you might be anything you chose," she replied, somewhat hastily, and regretted the words almost before she saw the gloom that overspread his expressive countenance.

"Might I—with this misshapen body?" he asked, with a contemptuous gesture.

"Yes," she went on boldly, determined to say out what had long been in her mind. "Who would see the shortcomings of your body when you can draw the very soul out of them with your music? If you had had the courage to face the world as you are, believe me, there would be no one whose fame or riches would exceed yours, no man or woman who would not be proud to receive a word of love from you!"

Here she stopped abruptly, appalled to see whither her pent-up feelings had led her.

His eyes flashed at her words, but he replied in a restrained manner:

"You may call it cowardice, and I have no right to contradict you. I have no wish for riches, and what is fame when there can never be anyone to make glad by it? For never would I wish to trick man or woman by the glamour of my music into a love that they could not otherwise have for me. Owen Rhys, as I am, body and soul. I am and must remain one apart; my life cannot be arranged on the same lines as any other man's."

Digitized by Google

Claire was too much abashed by the thought of the "too much" she had said to him to be able to reply, as she felt she ought:

"This is morbid; your deformity is much less than you, by long contemplation of it, have grown to think."

Besides, she knew that to his beauty-loving artist's soul, any deformity was repulsive and humiliating, so she only stammered:

"I beg your pardon."

Owen bowed; and then, with a return to a more conventional tone, he said:

"Still, Miss Gilchrist, if your father would like me to come and play to his guests, I will do so gladly, for the sake of a talk with so scholarly a gentleman, and so enthusiastic a musician as he is."

"Thank you," said Claire coldly; "I will tell him."

Poor Claire was deeply wounded. "He would not come as my guest and because I asked him, but he will come to oblige father and play. Is it pride, or is it what he really feels?"

A few minutes before, as he played with his glowing, passionate music, she felt as sure as she felt of anything in Heaven or earth, that he loved her, and yet directly after he was his usual impassive self, coldly putting aside her personal wishes, and making her feel that she had laid claim to an intimacy that did not exist when she criticised his plan of life.

And the same thing had happened so often, and the question that she ever asked herself was no nearer being answered than before: "Did he love her, or did he not?"

For imperious Claire Gilchrist, whom half the neighbouring youths had striven in vain to soften, had unreservedly given her heart to this poor, lame, village organist.

It was not, however, a fancy of a moment. For five years he had lived there almost in intimacy with her father, who liked the man and adored his genius. From the first she had seen through his cold manner, and discovered the fiery heart of gold that beat beneath his rugged exterior. With the patience of true love she had penetrated his reserve and found the noble spirit in which there was nothing small, or mean, or selfish. But she found, also, the simple nature that saw only two courses, right and wrong, and the iron determination that would never deviate from a course once decided on as right.

Her birthday came, and though her question was still unanswered, Claire, amongst her flowers and her friends, was apparently the gayest of the gay. In spite of her coldness to suitors, she had many friends amongst her own sex, who loved her perhaps all the better that she did not use her advantages of wealth and beauty to draw all the young men into her train.

She was in the midst of a laughing, chattering group, when her father, Sir Mostyn Gilchrist, approached, and said in a courtly manner that always suggested the elaborate ceremonial of a bygone age:

"Mr. Owen Rhys has done us the honour to consent to play to us, and at his own suggestion he will come into the garden for that purpose. All, therefore, who wish to take advantage of his kind offer will assemble under the large beech tree at five o'clock."

Claire swept him an elaborate courtesy, and replied:

"Good, my lord father—we will attend."

The others laughed at the appropriate reply, and he, calling her "a saucy minx," passed on to make a similar announcement to the other groups.

At five the many-coloured, laughing group under the beech-tree awaited the musician to whom all were prepared to accord admiration and applause, even those who knew nothing of music and cared less, since it was the fashion set by Sir Mostyn Gilchrist.

Claire expected him to sit and play his 'cello as he had so often done before, but what was her surprise when he appeared, limping slowly over the lawn, carrying in his hand a violin. Never had she heard him play that instrument, which must necessarily show to the greatest disadvantage all the defects of his figure.

Silently he took his place before them in the now slanting sunlight, his head bare, and his long, nervous, musician's fingers clutching at his violin. Then, with no other preliminary than a bow, he began to play.

And what music it was!

He first crashed out discords such as made his hearers writhe, and then came a wail of sadness that swelled and grew till it was a passionate cry to Heaven for pity. His dark eyes, looking straight in front of him, encountered Claire's, and she knew that it was to her he was speaking. The discords were his deformity, then came his cry for mercy, but after there followed a soft, tremulous note as of sunshine breaking through storms, melting the clouds, and turning turbid waters to gold with its gleam and promise, and this theme grew till it dominated everything; there was no more darkness or sadness, all was grand, and bright, and beautiful, and she knew that it was love, the beautifier, the illuminator.

Louder and more insistent grew the music till it was Love triumphant, Love, who rendered all things beautiful, even his deformity, and made him in the strength and beauty of his love worthy to mate with wealth and loveliness; but then the brightness and the glory died away, the chords sobbed and moaned under his touch till they suggested the slow recognition of a great grief; then there was a horrible wrench of pain, but at the last, renunciation, resignation, and peace.

As the last notes died away on the quivering air, Claire came to herself, and she felt that Owen's soul had spoken to hers in the music as it never would by words. Surely her question was answered, he loved her, but with a morbid horror of his deformity, he did not think it right to tell her of his love openly, and had therefore put it all into his music, knowing that if she loved him she would understand. She longed to be alone with him that she might say to him, "No need—no need for renunciation. In love all are equal, let the soul and heart be pure, and what matters the shape of the body?"

But then she caught his voice speaking calmly and naturally in reply to her father's congratulations and questions.

"It was only a fantasy I composed for Miss Gilchrist's birthday. I am glad that it has pleased you."

"It is magnificent! Come here, Claire, Mr. Rhys has indeed honoured you; come and thank him."

Claire came forward trembling, but his cool, composed glance fell on her almost like a dash of cold water, all the fire was gone from his eyes, and he received her thanks with the polite pleasure of an everyday acquaintance.

And then her father broke in:

"Yes, yes, I am sure I understand what you mean by it. You should call it 'Life,' the pangs of birth, the tranquil joys of childhood, the passionate loveliness of life in youth, old age approaching the pangs of dissolution, resignation to the will of God. Let me have it published—it will make you famous."

Owen bowed. "You do me too much honour, but, unfortunately, the score got burnt last night."

Sir Mostyn exclaimed in horror:

"But surely you can re-write it?"

"I do not think I could," he replied, and turned to reply to the thanks and compliments that the guests were crowding round to deliver. As soon as he had replied to all their more or less felicitous remarks, he became immersed in a discussion on the music of the masters with Sir Mostyn, and seemed to have already forgotten about his own composition, and Claire.

Claire, her whole spirit in a tumult, could not understand his calmness. That he could pour out his soul in a passion of love and longing and five minutes later there would be no sign of the slightest emotion even in his eyes. Was it all wonderful self-control, or was her father's interpretation the right one, and had she entirely misunderstood the meaning of his music!

If he really loved her, but would not declare his love on account of his poverty and deformity, ought she not to let him know that she loved him, as he had said, "himself, body and soul," and that her only happiness would be with him. But did he love her? Dare she risk it?

L. Hughes.

Digitized by Google

£25 IN CASH PRIZES!

1st Prize, £10. 2nd Prize, £5. 3rd Prize, £2.

And Eight Cash Prizes of £1 each.

WHAT YOU HAVE TO DO.

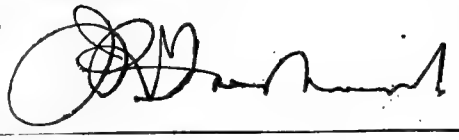
Below you will find six signatures. Each of these signatures is the ordinary signature of the person to whom it belongs. The writing is not assumed for the occasion; it is just the way in which each of the persons signs his name to letters or to cheques. The first set of signatures appeared last week.

What you have to do is to print in the space opposite each signature the name (initials, Christian name and surname) which you think it to be. Many of the names will be those of well-known people, others will be names of ordinary folk like yourself. No one but the Editor is in possession of the correct names of all the signatures shown. If you are in doubt as to the correct rendering of any signature or signatures ask some of your friends. When you have filled up the coupon to the best of your ability, cut it out and keep it by you, with the other coupons, until you see an announcement in SHORT STORIES telling you to send them in; together with the coupons which will appear in SHORT STORIES.

CONDITIONS.

(1) The name must be clearly printed in ink opposite each signature.
(2) Only one name is allowed in each space.
(3) No alterations are allowed in the words.
(4) When you have filled up your coupon, cut it out and keep it by you, together with the coupons which have appeared and will appear in SHORT STORIES.
(5) Each competitor may send only one set of coupons, but all the members of one household may compete. Each set will be accepted independently.
(6) In all cases the Editor's decision is final, and competitors may only enter on this condition.

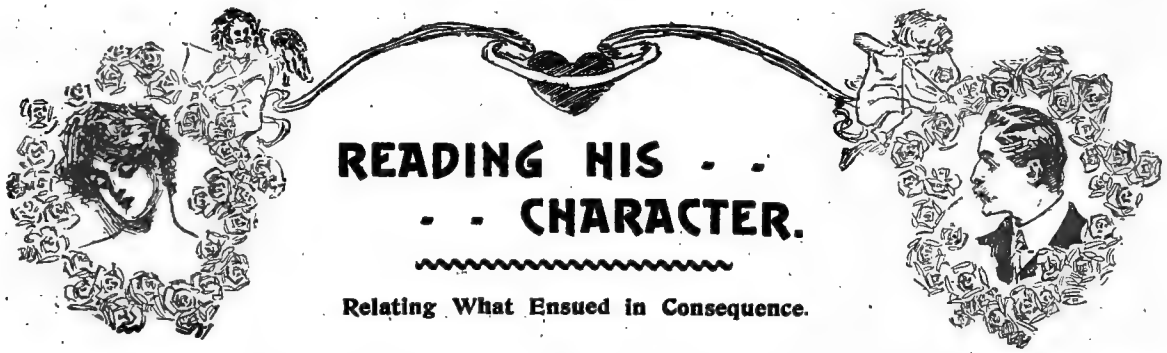
COUPON No. 2.

No. 7. 	
No. 8.	
No. 9.	
No. 10.	
No. 11.	
No. 12.	

NAME.....

ADDRESS.....

Google



READING HIS - - - - CHARACTER.

Relating What Ensued in Consequence.

THERE was the usual amount of noise, bustle, dust, and confusion that is always attendant upon the departure of a railway train. Dr. Hartwell's large, portly figure completely blocked up the entrance of the compartment as he stood taking leave of his patient. He had at last accomplished a result for which he had worked hard. No one would suppose, in looking from him to the frail, delicate young girl who, clad in deep mourning, was lounging back among cushions and shawls, that there ever could have been a contest between them. It seemed as if a breath might crush her, she was so very fragile; yet, as she raised her face to his in talking, and one caught a full look at it, the firm, resolute mouth and chin betrayed the undeniable fact that Leslie Graham had a very strong will of her own.

She had been ill with a long, nervous prostration following her father's death, and it had required all the skill of their old, faithful family physician, and the most assiduous care and nursing, to bring her back to life. Now, although it was two years since her father died, and her physical strength had in a great measure returned, she was very sad and morbidly melancholy. In the hope of rallying her, Dr. Hartwell had insisted on her going to the seaside, and had finally prevailed.

Now, when bidding her good-bye at the station, he took out of his pocket a little red morocco note-book, with her initials, L. R. G., stamped upon the outside cover, saying:

"Here is my prescription, and all the medicine I shall give you. I do not want you to read, or sew, or think at all. I want you to lounge about among the rocks, and drink in the sea air, and eat and sleep all you can. This book is for your observations of the people around you Your amusement and your medicine are to consist of studying the characters and the characteristics of your fellow creatures. Write down your first impression of a person, and the ideas you form of that person at sight; then, as your knowledge increases, you can see how far your intuitions were right. Of course, you will make some grand mistakes, but keep on, and your facility in reading character correctly will increase. You must forget yourself entirely, and occupy your mind with all the strange people that I hope to find written out here when you come back."

The guard blew his whistle.

"Good-bye," said the doctor. "Oh, by-the-way, my nephew, of whom you have heard me speak, has returned from Cyprus. He was in town the other day. I wanted to bring him with me, but he couldn't stop. He was in a hurry to join his mother and sister. I am sorry you did not meet him. Perhaps, though, I can interest him sufficiently in your case to induce him later to visit you in my stead."

"Dr. Hartwell, you will do no such thing!" Leslie exclaimed, indignantly. "I will not have a spy sent down to watch me. Your nephew may be the prodigy you think him; but I shall not like him; I have not the slightest desire to see him."

Dr. Hartwell was very much amused. This was quite like the old Leslie, who was always taking strong dislikes to people.

"Well, my dear, you needn't worry about it now. It is likely enough you will meet John some day. I certainly mean you shall, and when you do, you will be surprised to find how well you get on together."

The railway journey was not a very long one, but Leslie grew tired before she reached her destination. The breath of the sea, which occasionally stole in through the windows as they approached the terminus, was very refreshing.

Leslie was perfectly delighted when she found they were to stay at the "Bedford," situated close to the front. When they woke, in the night-time, they could hear nothing but the deep under-tones of the sea, and the splashing of the waves. Really, Dr. Hartwell had been very considerate about her after all.

She was too much fatigued that night to think of her prescription. She was scarcely conscious that there was any one in the large dining-room but her Aunt Harriet, who had accompanied her, and herself; and she drank her tea, and ate a slice of dry toast, oblivious of the many glances bestowed upon them. The slight, graceful figure, and the pale, delicately-moulded face, with large, blue-grey eyes, would have attracted notice anywhere.

There was a party of five seated opposite, a little below them, who seemed to regard Leslie with a great deal of interest Aunt Harriet thought. The group comprised an aged lady, two young ladies, and two gentlemen. One of the young ladies was tall, dark, and very stylish; the other was small, fair, and evidently an invalid, for a crutch rested behind her chair. One of the gentlemen was very brilliant and talkative, the other remained silent, but every time Aunt Harriet looked towards the group, his eyes were either fastened intently upon Leslie, or just turning away. She thought perhaps he knew her; but his face was perfectly inscrutable, and she could not make out whether recognition, admiration, curiosity, or all three, prompted his steady gaze. She told Leslie about them, after tea.

"I think, dear, they are very nice people," she said, after finishing her description of them.

"Well, I hope they are, if we are to sit so near them," Leslie replied. Then, brightening up a little, she continued: "I suppose I can begin my character study with them; they will probably be as interesting, from what you say, as anybody here. I feel very sorry for the young lady who is lame."

Leslie went down to the breakfast-table, the next morning, with her mind ready for its first encounter. She looked over at her neighbours opposite rather timidly, and after a little while, decided to begin with the young man who sat nearest, as his attention was entirely taken up with the lame lady.

He did not notice Leslie in the least, nor show any uneasiness under her close scrutiny. She had nearly finished her observations, and made up her mind in regard to him, when he suddenly turned and looked straight in her face, with an amused, questioning gaze, which said almost as plainly as words:

"Have you finished with me?"

Leslie was mortified and provoked. He had been aware, then, all the time, that she was looking at him, and had purposely kept his attention the other way. This was likely to prove a dangerous amusement, she thought, and one that

Google

might lead her into uncomfortable straits. Her face flushed very perceptibly, and in her embarrassment she caught the handle of her coffee-spoon in her sleeve, and overturned her cup. She was thoroughly angry now, but pride came to her rescue. She would not allow this trivial occurrence to discompose her. Surely she had sufficient dignity to sustain her in a moment like this.

"What a stupid performance, Aunt Harriet, is it not?" she said.

If it had been the young gentleman who was studying character he would have had a rare opportunity. The metamorphosis was wonderful of that quiet, subdued, sad-faced little girl of the night before. The features seemed to stiffen and grow cold, her eyelids drooped a little, her eyes became quite dark, her lips compressed, and her chin looked as if chiselled out of marble. She seemed "every inch a queen."

Soon after breakfast Leslie went to her room, and entered the following in her note-book—

"*July 8th.*—Made an attempt this morning, according to the doctor's prescription, to study a gentleman opposite us at table. He has a splendidly-formed head, the forehead jutting over, deep-set eyes—dark-blue, I think—large nose, mouth, and chin, light hair and moustache. He has a way of taking in everything with one glance, and knowing all that is going on in the room; also the power of seeing, apparently, out of the back of his head. His manner is commanding and rather overbearing, though not really ungentle. I should say that he was born with a feeling of superiority. He likes to place people at a disadvantage, and then be magnanimous. He could never stoop to ask a favour, he would ask it as his right instead. He is not quick-tempered. On the contrary, in a quarrel he could be exasperatingly cool, while he would make his opponent's blood boil with rage and fury. Altogether, he is quite disagreeable, and I hope that I shall not have to make his acquaintance. He turned to me with a most provoking look when I finished studying him, as if he knew just what I was doing, when, of course, he could not; to crown all, I upset my coffee. I suppose he thought he had produced quite an impression, to cause so much confusion. He is horribly conceited—not of his looks, but of his power over people. I shall grow to detest him if he stays here long. I wanted to study the nice old lady, and the lame girl, who has a lovely, sweet face; but I shall not dare to molest them while such an ogre mounts guard."

After the disastrous result of her first attempt, Leslie had not the courage to pursue her study any further. She tried not to notice these people at all, but she could not help meeting them on the stairs, in the hall, or out on the pier, and once or twice it seemed as if the lame young lady was about to speak to her.

Leslie found a delightful sheltered little nook, far out on a peninsula of rocks, where she and Aunt Harriet could lounge all the morning. She would spread out her heavy travelling-shawl and lie here for hours, lazily watching the vessels as they passed, till their white sails were lost in the distance.

It was impossible to withstand his pleading looks. One glance into his earnest face disarmed her entirely.

One day, while they were in this favourite haunt, a breeze suddenly wafted into Leslie's lap a dainty light-blue veil. A moment more, and it would have found a watery grave, but Leslie caught it.

She turned to see if the owner were near, and beheld the lame young lady at some little distance higher up on the rocks. The latter nodded, and beckoned with her hand, so there was nothing for Leslie to do, but clamber up the steep ascent and restore the property.

"What a tiresome breeze that was," the young lady began. "I thought I had tied my veil quite securely, when away it went all of a sudden, before I could catch it. Thank you, very much!" Then, in a rather hesitating, timid way, she said, looking up into Leslie's face: "Won't you sit down a little while? I am quite alone. My brother is reading his papers, and I came out with Arthur and Helen; but they saw some friends who were going out for a sail, and wanted to go, so I made them leave me, and told them I did not care if I was alone. But I should like very much to talk to you, if you do not mind."

This was all said so sweetly, that Leslie could not refuse, so she sat down beside her, and Aunt Harriet, seeing them enter into conversation, went up to the hotel, leaving Leslie to her fate.

It does not take two girls very long to become acquainted

Digitized by Google

when one is frank, cordial, and communicative, and the other is a sympathetic, appreciative listener. In little more than half-an-hour, Leslie knew all about Alice Rogers, for that was her name, and almost everything that had ever happened to her. She learnt, too, all about her brother, Dr. Franklin Rogers, the subject of her study, who had been abroad ever so many years, studying medicine, and was very learned. He was Alice's half-brother, as her mother had been a second wife, and he was the son of a former marriage. She also learnt that the dark, stylish young lady was Helen Spencer, one of Alice's intimate friends, and the young man so devoted to her was Arthur Campbell. He was very much in love with Helen; but Alice thought she could not quite make up her mind to have him, although he was wealthy. Helen had had so much attention, and so many offers, that it was hard for her to decide the momentous question.

They were chatting away, when they heard footsteps approaching. Alice turned, and saw her brother close behind them.

"Frank, I want to introduce you to Miss Graham. I have got acquainted with her, and we are already very good friends."

He raised his hat with a courteous bow, and seated himself.

"I am afraid, Alice, you have taken by storm what some persons have to toil years for. I should judge that Miss Graham's friendship is not always easy of acquisition."

And he looked at her inquiringly.

"But you are altogether and entirely wrong, Frank," Alice went on, in her perfectly child-like way. "She was not hard to get acquainted with, and I did not have to do it all, as you said I should."

He laughed at this, but did not seem in the least disconcerted.

"My dear Alice, you should not betray me in this manner. It was very foolish of me to make such a remark, and I beg Miss Graham's pardon most sincerely."

Leslie Graham was a remarkably truthful person. In her heart she knew that his judgment of her was correct. She did not make friends easily, and she was too honest with herself not to acknowledge that he was right. The most provoking part of it was that, notwithstanding his apology, his look into her face seemed forcing her to the confession that he was correct. After a momentary struggle, she said, with a sort of proud defiance:

"You are perfectly right, Dr. Rogers; I do not make acquaintances easily. It is quite wonderful to me, I assure you, the way your sister has succeeded with me in so short a time. I never knew such a thing to happen before."

He received her admission with a satisfied smile, which did not tend to lessen her indignation towards him. They talked a little while longer, and then, gathering up their shawls and wraps, they went back to the hotel. She could not help noticing how carefully he guided his sister over the rough rocks, lifting her in his arms over all the hard places. He was so very careful and tender with her that Leslie was forced to make an amendment in his favour, mentally.

After this, there was no more of quiet solitude for Leslie. She was constantly with some of the Rogers family. She and Alice grew to be very fond of each other. The physical affliction of the one, and the sorrow the other had passed through, drew them closely together, and a secret bond which neither could explain or understand united their hearts.

There was little time for character study outside the Rogers group. She made a few sketches, but did not have opportunities of following them out. Of Helen Spencer and Arthur Campbell she made very correct estimates, changing nothing in her first sketch, as her acquaintance progressed. With Mrs. Rogers, too, and Alice, she thought she did very well, but Doctor Rogers completely puzzled her. One day kind, thoughtful, deferential, and exceedingly entertaining; the next day commanding, tyrannical, quarrelsome, and altogether disagreeable. Sometimes she thought her first judgment had been absurdly harsh and unreasonable, and again she would think it not half severe enough.

He took it upon himself to look out for her, and care for her comfort in manifold little ways, the same as he did for Alice. It was very aggravating to Leslie, just after he had provoked her almost beyond endurance by some of his ironical speeches, to see him perform some unusually kind and thoughtful act for her. As such times she would either receive his attentions haughtily, or reject them entirely. Finally he said, one day, after such an occurrence:

"You do not like to have things done for you—to be waited upon—do you, Miss Graham?"

"No. I prefer always to wait upon myself." Then, thinking this might sound a little rude, she added: "I am quite an independent individual, and have always been used to looking out for myself."

"Yes, I have discovered that. Well, I do not like to be thanked for every trifling service I render, so let us make an agreement. You shall allow me to wait upon you, and care for your health and comfort, as I think the occasion demands, and you shall receive it all as a matter of course, and I will not look for any thanks or expressions of gratitude till the end of the season, when you can render them wholesale."

Leslie glanced up at him quickly. She suspected that he knew it was irksome to her to be under obligations to him, and hence the agreement he had proposed. But he was looking out on the water, and she could tell nothing of the tenor of his thoughts.

Once he was telling her of an adventure he had had in Cyprus, when the thought suddenly occurred to her that perhaps he had met Dr. Hartwell's wonderful nephew, so she asked:

"Did you ever meet a Dr. John Hartwell abroad? He is my doctor's nephew, and I have heard a great deal about him. That is—I presume his name is Hartwell—I don't know why I should, either, for now I think of it, I have never heard him called anything but 'my nephew, John.'"

"Dr. John Hartwell? Let me see," and he kept his head bent down over the stick he was prodding the sand with, his hat shielding the amused look in his eyes. "No. I do not remember meeting anyone of that name. Is he clever?"

"His uncle thinks he is; but I have no doubt his talent is over-estimated. Liking will go a great way towards prejudicing one's mind," Leslie said.

"Yes, that is very true, and so will dislike," and he looked at her significantly as he spoke.

What could he mean? She bit her lip with vexation, and turned away. He was accustomed now to all her changes of moods. He delighted in bringing the angry flush to her cheek, and the darker light to her eyes. He liked to watch the small lips grow stern, and the slight figure draw itself up into cold stateliness. He knew just what turns in the conversation would do all this, and he was proud of his knowledge.

The summer wore away to its close, and Leslie Graham was very much improved. She was really sorry that her stay was nearly at an end, and that she must part with these friends whom she had learnt to like so well.

Yes, she liked them all, not even excepting Dr. Rogers. Her sketch of him had undergone many changes. She had crossed out, rewritten, added to, and taken from, all the characteristics she had at first given him. But now, at the last, she decided that she had been very unjust to him, and that she had treated him with undeserved rudeness many, many times. She knew now that he had been very kind to her, and that he had done a great deal for her comfort and enjoyment. She was too intrinsically noble to let him go away without telling him as much. They might never see each other again, and he would always have the remembrance of her temper and unladylike behaviour.

On the last afternoon Dr. Rogers crossed the hall, looking quite disconsolate, just as Leslie was coming downstairs. He brightened up when he saw her.

"Oh, Miss Graham, you are the very one I want to see. Do come out rowing with me. Alice is taking a nap, and Helen is off somewhere with Arthur. I know you don't like sailing, so we will have a boat, and I will row. This is the last afternoon we shall have, you know," and he waited with an eager, intreating look, for her answer.

Digitized by Google

Yes, she would go. It would be such a good opportunity for her to say what she desired, and apologise for her rude behaviour. They might not be alone again.

When Dr. Rogers had rowed some distance out, Leslie, who had been rather silent all the way, began, with her head half-turned away from him :

"Dr. Rogers, I have something that I must say to you, before you go away ; I owe it to you, and to myself also. I want to thank you now for the many kindnesses you have done for me, and for all your care and attention, which, at the time, I received so ungraciously. I was really grateful then, only my pride kept me from acknowledging it, and if you will add your pardon for my rudeness to you, I cannot be too grateful."

She was going on, but he stopped her.

"I am well aware why you did not like me to care for you. I knew it was hard for you to accept favours from me, so I arranged our little agreement. It is all right, and please don't say any more. I have never thought you rude, Miss Graham."

So, then, he would not permit her to apologise.

She was not satisfied with this. She had meant to humble her pride, and if he would not let her do it this way, there yet remained others. She had not understood the full meaning of his remark. Perhaps he did not intend that she should.

"You do not understand me, Dr. Rogers. It was not because I did not like to receive favours, but because I did not like you. I took a great dislike to you, that first morning, at breakfast, when I spilt my coffee—do you remember ?"

She was approaching dangerous ground. Since their acquaintance, she had forgotten her feelings on that memorable morning, and her idea that he had suspected she was studying him.

"I do understand you. I knew perfectly well that you hated me, that morning, but I would not stop on that account."

Leslie began to be frightened. Did he know everything under the sun ? Did he know of her note-book, safely locked in her drawer at the hotel, and what was inside it ? He was the hardest person to accept an apology that she ever knew. She leant over the side of the boat, and dipped one hand in the water ; then laid it upon her hot face. She was uncertain what to do now. At last, with a desperate effort, she took a rash step.

"You are right. I hated you thoroughly, that morning. Dr. Hartwell wanted me to study people's faces and characters, and gave me a little book to write down my observations in. I began with you, with what success, you know. My first impressions, after you startled me so, were not very flattering, as you may suppose ; but I have since changed my mind," and she gave a nervous little laugh.

Dr. Rogers turned to her a radiant, triumphant face. He had been waiting for this. In a low, trembling voice, he said :

"I knew all that, too, Miss Graham."

Leslie was very angry now. She had meant to ask forgiveness for having wronged him ; now she was sure her first judgment was correct. With flashing eyes she said :

"Dr. Rogers, you will turn this boat round and row back, and, when we land, you will please understand that we are to meet as strangers, henceforth, for ever." Her voice was quite tragic, and freezingly cold.

In an instant the reaction came, and she covered her face with her hands, crying bitterly. She felt as if she should like to drop over the side of the boat, and find a hiding-place in the dark waters. She could not think what it all meant, he was so disappointed, so baffled, and perplexed.

Dr. Rogers had become quite pale at her last words ; but he laid down the oars, and came and knelt beside her. He took one of her hands away from her face and kissed it many times. She dropped her head on the railing in the stern, hiding her face from him, but did not take her hand away.

"You did not mean those dreadful words you said ?" And the love in his voice could be disguised no longer. "How can we meet as strangers, when you are more to me than all the rest of the world ? My darling, I know it was dreadful to deceive you so, but look up, and let me tell you all. Please !"

She lifted her head and looked drearily at him through her tears, as if he were a long distance off. It seemed as if nothing whatever that he could say would ever affect her again. She was unconscious that he still held her hand.

"I was sure that you would find me out long before this. I am Dr. Hartwell's detested nephew, but my name is not Hartwell, as you innocently supposed, one day. It amused me so, that I was on the point of letting out my secret. Dr. Hartwell is my own mother's brother, and the only one of the family who calls me John. I met him in town on my way here, and he told me about you, and of his plan respecting the character study. He did not know where to send you, and I suggested this place, and agreed to look out for you a little. He told me you were not over-anxious to meet me, and so together we formed this scheme ; but I did not dream but that you would see through it, as soon as we became acquainted. When I first saw you, I repented heartily of the part I had agreed to play. Still, the temptation was very great to make you take some notice of me, aside from my character of Dr. Hartwell's nephew. It was cruel, and I cannot hope for your forgiveness ; it is too much to ask ; but if you will let my life, my love, my whole heart and soul make atonement, I shall be perfectly happy."

It was impossible to withstand his pleading look. One glance into his earnest, glowing face disarmed her utterly. After all, the one most to blame had been Dr. Hartwell, who wanted her to like his pet nephew, and knew she never would, unless her prejudice were overcome.

Her face softened. Perhaps the best way to gain ascendency over this man, who was kneeling at her feet, would be to accept his love, and be his queen for ever, In her weakness and doubt, this seemed the easiest way out of her difficulty. She was afraid, too, that she was beginning to love him a little ; that is, before all this happened—now she did not quite know——

He was very quick to perceive her relenting.

"My own, my own," he cried, in his joy, "you are not going to send me away—you will keep me here for ever, close beside you, and take my whole life and love into your dear hands. You are mine now for ever and ever, and nothing can part us," and he folded her in his arms.

Long before Dr. Rogers had rowed the boat back to the shore, all Leslie's hauteur was gone, and perfect peace reigned between her and her lover. If you had seen the tenderness with which he assisted her to land, and the shy consciousness with which she accepted his aid, you would never have supposed that she started out with the intention of breaking off with him for ever.

Dr. Hartwell was perfectly satisfied with the result of his prescription. He often teases Leslie Rogers about it. But her husband never seconds him, for it came near proving a fatal prescription—to him, at least. Among his choicest treasures, he carefully and tenderly guards his wife's wedding gift, the little red morocco book, which contains the portrait of himself, drawn by her hand.

Ernest Kessler.

Pearson's Fortune Teller.

By Professor P. R. S. Foli.

Crown 8vo, cloth, price 1s. post free 1s. 2d.

ORDER FORM, S.S.

To the Book Publisher,
17 Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

Please send me a copy of "Pearson's Fortune Teller" for which I inclose the sum of one shilling and twopence.

Name.....

Adress .....

Condemning it.

"AFTER all, love and war are the only proper themes for a poet." "Why do you say love and war? Why don't you just say marriage?"

It Was a Match.

HE had lent her his fountain pen to direct an envelope. She: "Why, doesn't it write beautifully? I declare I'm in love with this pen." He: "I'm in love with the holder!" She saw the "point."

Silence is Golden.

WITHERBY: "I made the mistake of my life this morning. I told my wife I didn't like her new gown." Plankington: "Was she angry?" Witherby: "Oh, no, it wasn't that; but she wants another."

Cause for Annoyance.

YOUNG MR. GRASPER (fondly): "You know, darling, that if I were to die all I have would be yours." Young Mrs. G. (poutingly): "What's the good of saying that? You know you're not likely to die yet!"

There were Defalcations.

CASHIER: "I wish to marry your daughter, sir. May I have her?" Proprietor (who has just been examining the books): "Well, I suppose I'd better give my consent. I want to keep the money in the family."

It Was!

"WILLIAM," she said gently, and yet in accents of reproof, "you remember that I gave you several letters to post last week, don't you?" "Y-yes, I remember it." "But this is the first time you have remembered it since I gave them to you, isn't it?"

Her Reason was a Good One.

"YES, George asked me how old I would be on my next birthday." "The impudent fellow! Of course, you said nineteen?" "No; I said twenty-six." "Mercy, girl, you're only twenty-four." "I know, but George is going to give me a cluster ring with a diamond in it for every year."

Why He was Happy.

"HALLO, Charley! What's up? Never saw you looking so jolly and happy!" "My girl has just got married." "Got married? Why, man, is that anything to be gay and festive over? You ought to be in the last stage of melancholy." "That's all right. You see. I'm the fellow she's married."

He was Indeed Sympathetic.

"It's a solemn thing, young man," said the broken-hearted father, "to come into the house of an old man and take away his only daughter, the light of his household and the prop and solace of his declining years. But you have my blessing, and I wish you every joy, and——" "But I won't take her away, sir," interrupted the young man, inexpressibly affected. "We'll both stay here."

A Delightful Compliment.

"Do you ever gamble?" she asked, as they sat together, her hand held in his. He replied: "No; but if I wanted to, now would be my time." "How so?" "Because I hold a beautiful hand." The engagement is announced.

No Cause for Alarm.

SHE: "Mrs. Moffat's such an odd woman! She's fond of meeting clever people, you know, and she never opens her lips, but listens to every word they say, and puts it all down in a diary after!" The Chump: "Haw—by Jove! I shall take precious good care what I say before her!"

Then He Understood.

YOUNG HUSBAND: "Isn't there something peculiar about the taste of these onions, my dear?" Very Young Wife (anxiously): "Oh, I hope not, dear! I took such pains with them. I even sprinkled them with lavender water before I put them to boil, to take away that unpleasant odour."

Time's Work.

YOUNGLOVE: "I suppose I'm foolish, but I can't sleep at nights. I'm so afraid that something unexpected may happen to prevent my approaching marriage." Oldtimer: "Well, after awhile you'll lie awake at nights regretting that it didn't happen."

The Way of Women.

ETHEL: "Why, Maudie, you've been crying!" Maud: "Yes, it's all the fault of Tom." Ethel: "Oh! what has he been doing?" Maud: "Well, we had a little bit of a tiff last night, and I told him he was simply an unendurable brute, and now he hasn't had the decency to send me a letter of apology."

Circumstances Alter Cases.

"WHAT do you want?" asked the servant who answered the ring at the door. "I want to see Mr. Edward Annan." "What for?" "It is in relation to a promissory note." "Mr. Annan went out of town yesterday." "That's too bad. I wanted to pay him the amount I owe him." "But," quickly added the servant, "he returned this morning."

His Last Resource.

HE had put the fateful question to her on the grand stand at the races, and she answered "No." "Is there no chance of you ever loving me?" he pleaded. "The odds are a thousand to one against it," was the pitiless reply. He sighed, then braced himself up. "It's a long shot," he said, at last; "but with nothing else in the field I'll take it."

What the Trouble Was.

FIRST YOUNG MAN: "Why don't you get married?" Second Young Man: "I have made several attempts, but none of them have been successful." "What's the trouble?" "Well, you see, as soon as a girl pleases me well enough to marry her, it is just my luck to meet some other girl who pleases me better. It has been going on that way with me for the last twenty years."

A Great Man.

"DOES your wife ever pay you any compliments?" asked Frederick Jimson of his friend Benderly. "Never," replied Benderly. "Well, mine does. She flatters me." "Often?" "Oh, yes, frequently; particularly in winter," replied Frederick. "Why does she flatter you more in winter?" "Whenever the coal fire needs replenishing she points to the fire-place, and says: 'Frederick, the grate.'"

The Warning Had Its Effect.

"THERE is something about your daughter," Mr. Wanshop began reflectively; "there is something about your daughter——" "Yes," said old Mr. Thistlepod, "there is; I have noticed it myself. It comes every night about eight o'clock, and it doesn't get away usually till about eleven o'clock. And some of these evenings I am going to lift it all the way from the front door to the side gate, and see what there is in it."

Digitized by Google

SPLENDID SERIAL.

Dupes of Destiny

LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT

By Blanche Eardley, Writer of "The Bond Between."

FORTY-SEVENTH CHAPTER.

The Face Behind the Veil.

LOTTIE'S eyes filled slowly with tears. "Yes, yes," she said gently. "You will be able to show Dolly the flowers; only you must be very quiet, for if anyone hears you, you might be prevented from coming with me."

A look of cunning sharpness crept into the big, bright eyes of the mad woman. "Oh, yes, I will be very good!" she answered quickly. "See, I will put something in my bed to make Deacon think I am still there, when he pays his last visit." She hastily rolled some white, filmy garments round the bolster of the bed, and placing it between the sheets, covered it up, then, to the amazement of the waiting girl, she took a pair of scissors and cut off the long mane of dark hair which she so arranged on the pillows as to make it appear that a live woman was sleeping upon them.

Then a few moments later two figures, one clasping a doll in her attenuated arms, crept up the stairs. The key was placed under the mat again, and then they proceeded on their perilous way until a door in another wing was softly opened and bolted immediately afterwards.

* * * * *

Towards midnight Sir Cyprian sent for the nurse and gave her a few curt orders. "You will follow immediately afterwards, you hear. We start at dawn. I shall require you to dress her and send her down here—by herself—you understand? I want no prying glances, and I shall expect you there by the next train. I have my reasons for not wishing you to accompany us. But, as you know, I possess a little secret of yours, Miss Haste, that is better where it is than spread abroad." He smiled coldly. "You may go now; only, remember, at dawn to-morrow morning she must be ready."

"I understand," Lottie answered slowly. "I shall not fail you, Sir Cyprian; all shall be as you desire."

When she had left the room the baronet drew aside the blind and looked out of the window. It was a clear night, and the blue sky was studded with stars. As he stood looking out, a shadow that seemed to rise from the ground approached the window and stared into the room. For a moment the eyes of the two men met in a long, keen glance, then the man outside vanished; and Sir Cyprian fell back with a hoarse cry. The face that had looked in on him was the face of the man who had betrayed his knowledge with the sign of the mysterious spade that night long ago, when he had dined at his sister-in-law's with Marcella, and had met for the first time the financier, Caleb J. Johnson.

"Flash Dick!" he muttered, with trembling lips. "Why has he come back? I thought he had forgotten that incident when he darted from behind the palms. Is this to be a case of the best man wins, I wonder?" Then, feeling in his pocket, he drew out a large silver revolver, and looked at it thoughtfully. "Yes, the best man wins, and the presence of my friend Flash Dick here points to the wisdom of leaving the Court soon."

* * * * *

At daybreak a silent trio left the Court, two men and a woman, heavily cloaked and veiled, whose slender arm was held by the taller of the men, a darkly-visaged person with an abundance of black, greasy-looking hair showing under his broad-brimmed hat, but the rest of his face was clean-shaven, and of an olive hue. A dog-cart took them to the station at a large junction, where less comment would be created by their unusual appearance. The woman was put into a first-class apartment, which was reserved, the two men going into an adjoining smoking apartment, where they conversed in low tones. But the woman remained quite quiet, neither moving nor raising her head from where she had laid it, except once when she touched with thoughtful fingers the low white brow that was covered by a mass of dusky hair. When the journey was over there was another long, silent drive across country until finally the huge gates of a grimly forbidding house, standing behind a dense growth of trees, was reached.

The man with the white face and black hair hastily pulled the slender, timid figure from the trap, and urged her before him as he would have a frightened animal. They took her into a room that was destitute alike of comfort or furniture.

Digitized by Google

Then the elder man turned with a snarling laugh to the one that followed on his heels.

"There, she is safe now, the precious creature! She has caused me more trouble than anything else. Go and prepare her, Day, my boy, for the wedding ceremony!" Then, with a laugh of ironic triumph at the silent figure standing like a statue, he left the room.

Edward Day glanced keenly at the girl whom he had vowed to humble in the dust one day, and whose pride he meant to bring low. Her scorn and loathing of him were so many baits to his vengeance upon her and the other woman who had cast him off like a dismissed servant.

"Marcella!" he said softly. "You are mine now; you remember my vow to win you! I have kept it. Look at me, my proud, beautiful Marcella—we are to be married to-day! We shall leave here man and wife!" He laughed exultantly, and his blue eyes shone with excitement. He had won; yes, in the face of all obstacles he had attained his heart's desire. He had humbled the financier, silenced his blackmailer, shamed his benefactress, and shaken off the millstone that had hung round his neck; and, lastly, had won the woman he wanted.

He went nearer to her. Her silence irritated him. He would have preferred tears, scorn, anything, but this baffling silence. "Come, kiss me, my bride!" he whispered, drawing her to him.

Then with one quick gesture she flung back her thick veil and stood face to face with him.

"You!" he gasped, falling back a step, his evil, sneering face growing livid with fear and horror, as his eyes, instead of seeing those of the dark, imperious woman he had plotted to win, met instead the mocking blue ones of the woman whom he had thought dead, and for whom, oh, bitterness! he had been afterwards tempted to forgery!

He had been duped by the clever rogue who had twisted him round his finger to the tune of several thousands, and who also had made his life hideous with threats.

Now the woman herself, the incubus whom he had hoped, yet feared, was lying at the bottom of the river that told no tales, had in her turn outwitted him in his moment of supreme triumph!

From the waters that had sucked her down in their close embrace she had risen to confront him—not only as the woman whose death he had sought to bring about, but as a would-be bigamist.

"You!" he said again, moistening his trembling lips. "What fate dragged you from the place where I last saw you?"

"You mean surely the *grave* where you flung me like the coward that you are!" she said, in a low, intense voice; "your wish would have been accomplished had not another man, with as black a soul as your own in some respects, had sufficient humanity in him to pull me out. So you see I have conquered this time, my dear husband. I have watched your plans and stepped in between them."

The white, cruel face of Edward Day took unto it a sinister look of hatred and spite, as he said slowly:

"So another scoundrel pulled you out, eh? I think I have had the honour of meeting that gentleman, and the occasion of our last interview was not a very pleasant one for him." Then he added with a snarl: "Are you aware that you have done a very foolish thing in flinging yourself across my path again? You forget that I am still capable of wiping you out of my way!"

Lottie Haste laughed bitterly. "Yes, I know that I am here, and that you are capable of any villainy even in my father's house! Ah!" as he started, "you did not know that Water Grange was my home? You thought of marrying Marcella Rust with the 'Vicar' as officiating clergyman; but, thank God, I have prevented you from committing that crime. She is where neither you nor her worthy father can harm her."

"Where's that?" he said sharply. "I shall find her wherever you have hidden her—you need not imagine that I shall allow anything to stand in the way. If you wish to get away from here alive, you will reveal the whereabouts of my cousin, Marcella Rust, otherwise"—he shrugged his shoulders—"you will be sorry that the other man saved you from the river."

"Your cousin!" she repeated, looking at him with fearless eyes. "Why do you lie like that now? You know perfectly well that Marcella Rust is no relation of yours. You were adopted and then cast off by Lady Violet Frayne-Lennox. You see I know all your history from the time that you were a foundling on board a ship."

He flushed dully, and the light of hate gleamed in his eyes. He saw that the cold, contemptuous woman was not the tender, yielding girl he had so easily removed from his path before.

"What do I care what you know?" he snarled between his teeth. "It's nothing to me whether all the world knows that I was born in a third-class bunk on an Australian liner. I shall shortly prove my right to a better title, which I shall take jolly good care will not be shared by you."

He had raised his voice unconsciously, and the last sentence rang out sharply and reached the ears of a man who was strolling to and fro in the hall outside: "It's nothing to me whether all the world knows that I was born in a third-class bunk on an Australian liner. I shall shortly prove my right to a better title."

Sir Cyprian Rust caught his breath quickly. Those words conjured up in his mind the words of a dying woman, whose end he had hastened, and had forgotten as unworthy of note. She had said that the stewardess had told her of two children born to the runaway wife of the adventurer Jerningham, and he had imagined it to be the fancy of a disordered mind.

Then he had found out the truth about Philip Nullius, and no thought about that other claim had occurred to him. He had been too concerned as to putting the curate out of the way to even attach any importance to the suggestion that there might be another rival to the riches he held.

But now, as Edward Day's clear, scornful voice fell upon his ears, it all came back in a rush of memory. He recollected how he had paid no attention to the rumours he had heard from time to time that the handsome young secretary was of humble origin, and it was with a curious tightening of his mouth that he suddenly realised that the man he wished to tie Marcella to in a loveless marriage was joint heir with that other, and that after all he had been outwitted by Fate.

Instead of bringing the pride of the sister-in-law, whom he hated, down in the dust by marrying Marcella to a "nobody," he was precipitating her into the arms of one of his unconscious enemies. He was helping to raise her to a position above his own head, instead of levelling her into the gutter.

Since the day when she had made her will in his favour, his hatred had increased by slow degrees, and all the frustrated attempts to gain by that will had intensified that bitterness of hate. He hesitated outside the door, as all these thoughts flooded his brain, then he decided upon a bold move.

He pushed open the

Digitized by Google

door and walked in. Lottie had quickly turned her back on his entrance, but Edward Day faced him with a sarcastic grin.

FORTY-EIGHTH CHAPTER.
Laying the Trap.

Sir Cyprian gazed from one to the other. "I thought I heard you speaking rather loudly—er—Day," he said slowly. "Has Marcella refused to listen to you, or does she, like a sensible girl, agree to forget the curate, Philip Nullius?"

Edward laughed vindictively. Although he was cheated himself he did not object to seeing the suave baronet also made a fool of by Marcella and the woman he had hoped dead.

"I'm afraid, sir," he said harshly, "that we counted our chickens before they were hatched. Turn, 'Marcella'!" he laughed again, "and show your sweet self to your adoring parent. He will be almost as overjoyed as I was to see your face."

With a sudden movement Lottie wheeled round, and as Sir Cyprian saw the face of the woman whom he had imagined was an obedient tool, he reeled against the wall with a muttered imprecation.

"So," he said thickly, "you have betrayed me after all, have you, you spying little kitchen cat. I suspected you at first, then thought your previous experience would have taught you a lesson. Where is she? Do you hear?" he snarled savagely; "you had better not try to lie to me, or you will regret it."

Lottie flung back her head, and her blue eyes flashed triumphantly into those of the two desperate men whom her sharp wit had baffled.

All thought of her own danger in being there, in that lonely house, at the mercy of such unscrupulous blackguards, never, for one second, occurred to her.

She was glad that she had fought them, and won in the contest of wits, and to the consequences that would result from her action she was both indifferent and callous. It was enough that she was mistress of the situation—that, for the nonce, she held the ribbons in her own strong, young hands.

"Where is she?" and her voice was low and yet firm.

"To which particular 'she' do you refer, Sir Cyprian?"

The baronet started, and looked at her searchingly.

"I refer to my daughter, Marcella Rust," he said deliberately. "You have hidden her, I suppose—but admirable as your plans may have been, I fancy, dear Miss Haste, they are bound to create merely a postponement of my first intention. Now you understand what you are requested to tell me at once, or my little threat concerning a little attempt at suicide on your part will be the means of an unpleasant inquiry."

A short, scornful laugh broke from the girl's lips, and she flashed a mocking glance at the sullen, white face of Edward Day, who stood aside, biting the ends of his moustache with ill-concealed irritability.

"And I conclude, my dear Sir Cyprian, that you will go into the witness-box on my account? Surely that would be rather unwise just now! I will tell you with pleasure where Marcella is," she added, as the baronet winced suddenly under her words.

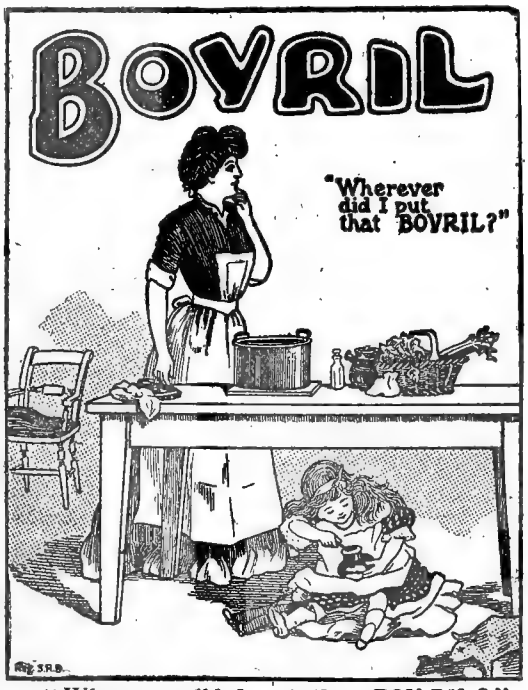
"By this time I hope she is safe where your cruelty cannot touch her, nor that"—pointing to the other man—"unspeakable cad can dare attempt to add bigamy to the list of his crimes. You are a charming couple, but at any rate you have lost what you have plotted to win, and I thank God that I have been instrumental in stopping your villainy."

Sir Cyprian's lips parted in a hideous grin, and his eyes glittered angrily.

"I presume you allude to Mr. Day," he said, in a quiet tone. "May I inquire why he should be so honoured by your attentions?"

"Because he is my husband!" was the steady reply. "Because he is a would-be murderer!"

Sir Cyprian drew in his breath with a sibilant sound. He



"Wherever did I put that BOVRIL?"

A spoonful of

BOVRIL

doubles the quantity of gravy, and makes it much more delicious.

"Tell the Cook."

had not expected that Edward Day would have made such a fool of himself as to marry. He had credited him with more brain and perhaps more villainy. This girl, then, held him in her power—in fact both of them, so far, but he knew the art of wriggling out of tight corners, and the excitement lent a zest to his blood.

It reminded him of the days of his youth when, before stepping into his uncle's shoes, he had been living by his wits—a free lance of the law—and he had always come out on top; and it would amuse him to let this slip of a white-faced, defiant girl hurl her puny strength against his. He would know how to crush her, when she bored him!

He laughed softly, and said:

"Ah, indeed! I think you will have a little difficulty in establishing your claim, and, also, you may find it awkward to get away from here."

Lottie looked at him, the ghost of a smile on her lips, and lurking in the depths of her tired, blue eyes.

"You cannot frighten me, and I have insured myself from harm in a way you don't know of. Both yourself and my most affectionate husband will be disagreeably surprised should you attempt to silence me after the methods dear to ur hyoearts. Marcella is safe with her aunt by this time—so you may give up that game and look after yourselves. You will need it—soon!"

Edward sprang forward, an evil look in his eyes.

"You little cat!" he snarled, grasping the girl's arm tightly. "So you have sent her there, have you? You have dared to play into the enemy's hands, and to twit us with it!" He raised his clenched hand and struck her savagely across the mouth, raising a deep scarlet weal that stood out like a flame against the background of the white face.

She reeled with a little cry, and fell heavily to the ground. As the enraged man was about to repeat his blow, his arm was caught by the Baronet.

"Come, Edward," he said quietly, "it is hardly worth while you continuing that sort of thing. It is apt to become awkward, you know."

The girl on the ground raised herself on her elbow, and glanced up at them, a smile of agony distorting the expression of her mouth. "Yes, it will be very awkward, Sir Cyprian," she said slowly. "Marcella did not leave the Court alone; she went with——"

A curious change crept over the Baronet's face. It aged suddenly. "With whom?" he said hoarsely.

Moving her lips with difficulty, she answered:

"With the woman whom you kept in the hidden wing!"

"Ah!" the word was breathed deeply between the Baronet's firmly-closed teeth, as though he had been stung, and when he turned towards Edward Day his face was grey, and a steely light flickered in his eyes.

"I will leave you to have a chat with your wife, my dear Edward," he said softly, "only don't be long. I have some important news for you. And remember—no violence."

He left the room, and closed the door softly behind him, with a gentle smile.

An hour later he was talking in a low, cautious tone to the younger man, who listened to him with exultation and suppressed excitement.

"I know," Sir Cyprian was saying, "that that curate is scoring off you in more ways than one. He has Marcella, and, unless you fight him with strategy, he will gain your inheritance as well. Your birthright will go—he will have everything!"

"What do you mean?" Edward said sharply. "How do you know about that? I thought I alone was aware of my mysterious birth!"

The Baronet smiled. "Philip Nullius also is of ambiguous birth. Supposing I knew that he was the eldest born, and all the gain was to him, with but a mere pittance to you as the younger son? You would win no position that you desired, even though you gain money in other ways. Philip Nullius, who knows nothing of this fortune waiting for him—once out of the way of ever learning of it—would clear the way for you."

"What do you mean?" Edward said hoarsely. "He is with the Frayne-Lennox set now. It is too late to see him; Marcella is there also, according to that wretched spoil-sport in the other room. I'm afraid we are too late for anything."

"No. I have received information that Philip Nullius returns to his curacy this week," replied Sir Cyprian slowly. "A wire telling him that Marcella wants him will place him at our mercy—we will arrange where afterwards. That will do as a bait—and then——" he paused.

Their eyes met in one significant glance.

"And then!" Edward Day muttered with a grim smile.

FORTY-NINTH CHAPTER.

The Two Women.

Lady Violet Frayne-Lennox, as she still was called, in spite of that marriage ceremony with the financier, Mr. Caleb J. Johnson, paced the floor of her drawing-room with quick, impatient steps.

She had been for several days too unwell to leave the house, but had been in daily correspondence with the man whose wife she had become in name only. He had been very thoughtful and considerate for her, and in spite of his great wrong in marrying her through a fraud, she could not rid herself of a feeling of dependence upon his strength.

It was some days after the sudden disappearance of Philip Nullius, and she had not seen Mr. Johnson since that date either. But she had that morning dispatched a message to the financier, asking him to call round, and now it wanted but a few moments to his arrival.

She was distraught at the idea of what might have taken place at the Court, the place where Marcella lay ill, and which she dared not enter for fear of bringing down upon her head an avalanche of shame and fear.

As she aimlessly wandered from one end of the large, handsomely furnished room to the other, she paused abruptly. The bell had rung, and her unerring instinct told her that it was Caleb J. Johnson—the man whose name had been bestowed upon her while her first husband was still alive, and yet, in spite of her horror and amazement, she could not feel other than dependent upon him.

The door opened and the financier entered.

"Well, Caleb!" she said feverishly. "What news?—tell me quickly."

He looked at her without speaking, and it struck her, even in the midst of her personal fear and anxiety, that he seemed strangely unlike himself, and there was in his face the look of one who had staggered beneath a crushing blow.

"What—what is it?" she murmured, putting out one trembling white hand and touching his arm. "Caleb, what has happened? Tell me."

A grim smile twisted the lips of the man before her.

"Only the inevitable, Violet—the inevitable reckoning that Fate withholds for perhaps years, or only days, but which in the end is just as crushing and distasteful to meet. Defeat, Violet, has met me at last! I have turned all the corners in my life with almost unnatural success, and now, at the eleventh hour, I have been floored—humbled in the dust—and by a boy not more than half my age!"

He laughed bitterly.

"There's the sting—an ignorant boy has pitted his skill against mine, and by the free use of an unscrupulous brain and cunning, has won over my head, and beaten me at my own game!"

"You mean that you have lost money, Caleb?" she questioned gently.

"Lost money!" He laughed again. "Not only is it money I have lost, Violet, but my name in the City! The fortune I built up so proudly has gone, and with it my power; to-morrow I shall be known as a failure, and a man who could not meet his liabilities. Then will follow the bankruptcy of the Gold King."

(Continued on page 381.)

Digitized by Google

The most effective, convenient and the cheapest article for scouring, cleaning and polishing purposes.

SPARKLA

MAKES TIN LIKE SILVER, COPPER LIKE GOLD.

Cleans and Brightens Copper, Tin, Pewter, Brass, and all metal ware. For washing dishes, kitchen utensils, and for all general household cleanings. Removes rust, stains, tarnish. Cleans gas and cooking stoves, machinery, bicycles, dairy utensils. For the house, shop or factory.

Sold by all Grocers, Ironmongers, Oilmen, Stores, &c.

ONE PENNY PER TABLET.

GIGANTIC PRIZE SCHEME

120,419 PRIZES VALUE £25,969.

Cash Prizes up to £100 each. Great numbers of Watches, Cycles, Sewing Machines, Timepieces, Dress Lengths, and thousands of other costly and useful articles.

Collect the Wrappers of SPARKLA and send them to the address below. Wrappers of WATSON'S MATCHLESS CLEANSER and WATSON'S NUBOLIC SOAP may also be used by competitors.

Full particulars with each tablet of any of the three articles.

Every Competitor in our last Prize Scheme received a Prize.

JOSEPH WATSON & SONS LTD., Whitehall Soap Works, LEEDS.

An admirable Food of the

EPPS'S

Finest quality and flavour.

COCOA

Nutritious and Economical.

THE DAILY EXPRESS 1D. 1/2

GIVEN AWAY

with this week's

HOME NOTES

(No. 531)

A PAPER PATTERN of this

BOY'S SUIT.

Of all Bookstalls and Newsagents.

PRICE ONE PENNY.

If you wish to SLEEP WELL

—TAKE—

BEECHAM'S PILLS

You will SLEEP WELL,

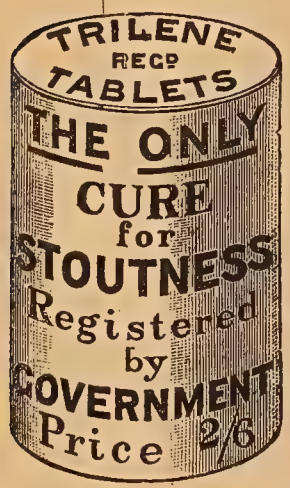
because **BEECHAM'S PILLS** gently calm irritation of the Nervous system, while by their stimulative and cleansing action upon the Liver and Kidneys, Digestion proceeds with normal regularity, so that at night the tranquillised mind and body are prepared for "Nature's sweet restorer"— peaceful slumber. Should one feel restless after an exciting or convivial evening a dose of **BEECHAM'S PILLS** will quickly induce refreshing sleep.

Sold everywhere in Boxes, price 1/1½ (56 Pills), and 2/9 (168 Pills).

ALL FAT PEOPLE

Can be **CURED** by taking

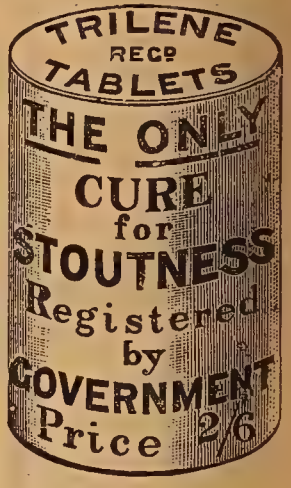
TRILENE TABLETS Regd.



For a few weeks. They will safely REDUCE WEIGHT and CURE CORPULENCY PERMANENTLY, whether Abdominal or General. They are small, agreeable, harmless, sent privately, and never fail to Improve both HEALTH and FIGURE without change of Diet.

An English Countess writes: "Your Trilene Tablets act admirably."

Send 2s. 6d. to Mr. T. Wells, THE TRILENE CO., 66 Finsbury Pavement, London, E.C.



SAMPLES OF TESTIMONIALS.

"87 Alexandra Road, Norwich, October 19th, 1896.
Gentlemen,—In reference to Trilene Tablets, I may say that my wife found the greatest possible benefit from the use of them; their action was rapid, and exceeded our utmost expectations, as they were also most beneficial to the respiratory organs. My wife was many years growing so stout, but although the disease was, I consider chronic, the Tablets soon reduced the same completely.
"Yours faithfully, J. R. CANHAM."

COUNTESS SECKENDORFF, of Berlin, writes: "The Tablets greatly benefited me personally, and I am recommending them to friends."

MISS CHATTERTON, 7 Salisbury Villas, Banstead, Surrey, says: "I weighed 12st. 8lb., but am now 11st., and getting much better."

Nurse CROUCHER, at Mrs. Bennett's, 14 Buckleigh Road, Streatham, says: "I lost 9lb. from the box I took."

Mrs. D. BURTON, of Silverleigh, Tunbridge, writes: "I am very pleased with difference in size, my friends all telling me how much thinner I am getting."

Miss NORTHLEDGE, The Laurels, Riseholm Road, Lincoln, says: "The Tablets reduced me 1st., so that I am cured."
"West Cornforth, Ferryhill.

Mr. WM. USHER says: "A sister of mine, who was 17st., was greatly reduced by your Tablets to 15st."

Extract from *The Lady*, September 3rd, 1896: "Many stout persons have suffered untold agonies in unavailing efforts to reduce their bulk, either by means of severe dieting, or by taking more or less deleterious drugs; but all these pains would have been saved if they had only invested in a box of the wonderful Trilene Tablets, which are quite harmless, containing neither mercury, arsenic, nor any other mineral poison, and which are an unfailing cure for obesity."

MRS. T. BOSTON, Cambridge Villas, Clifford Street, South Wigston, says: "I congratulate you on your wonderful Tablets. My weight at first starting them was 11st. 7lb., and I now weigh 9st. 11lb."

Mr. MCLEOD, 44 Calside, Paisley, writes: "I have been cured. If you want to know my weight now, it is 10st.; reduced 1st. 8lb., and I am quite content."

COUNT EHRENWAUD, of Liatorp, Sweden, writes, 9th Oct., 1899: "The person who took Tablets lost 18lb. during the cure."

Mr. GIBBS, 147 Richmond Park, Kimberworth, Rotherham, says: "Since I began with them they have reduced me 2st 3lb., and I am pleased to say I am a great deal better in health and in every way."

Mrs. FENTON, 11 Wood Street, Tyldesley, writes: "Been fat all my life, but now your Tablets tell a tale. I have lost 17lb. already and am delighted."

Mrs. MARY WILLIAMS, of Old Yard, near Redol, Bagillt, Wales, writes Nov. 22nd, 1898: "Your Tablets reduced me 2st., and have benefited me greatly."

A. M. PRATT, of Ongar House, Ongar, says: "My weight is so much reduced it is unnecessary to take more. The reduction of weight was from 12st. 0lb. to 10st. 4lb."

Mrs. H. COX, 28 Watnall Road, Hucknall Torkard, writes: "The box of Tablets has reduced my weight 1½ stones."

Mrs. PEARCE, Armstrong Road, Benwell: "Reduced from 12st. to 9½st. and do not get any heavier."

Col.-Sergt. WHITTLE, of East Lancashire Regt., Burnley, Lancs., says "A man in our regiment in 1891 lost several stone from taking your Tablets."

Mrs. ROLLITT, of North Farm, Letwell, says: "Tablets have done a world good—reduced 14lb. already without altering diet."

Mrs. W. A. RADFORD, of High Street, New Brinsley, Eastwood, writes: "Before taking Tablets I was 46 inches round waist, now I am 32 inches. I hope soon to be 23. I could hardly move or get up, now I get about easily. Please use this as you wish."

Countess FURSTENBERG, of Germany, writes: "They act speedily and well."

The Princess LIECHTENSTEIN writes from Landsberg, Austria: "Pray send me your excellent Tablets."

Mrs. WEAVER, of Greenpits Villa, Ross, Hereford, writes: "I am reduced from 13st. 8lb. to 11st. You may use this if you like."

Mrs. CROSSLEY, of Rose Hill, Torver, nr. Coniston, says: "There is a very decided diminution of fat. I am delighted, and cannot speak too highly in praise of Tablets. My heart is better, and I can breathe so much easier. You may refer to me as often as you like."

Lady C. CONRAD writes from Wiesbaden: "I am very pleased with your Tablets."

Miss JANE CARTER of Forthampton House, Tewkesbury, says: "The Tablets are of the greatest value. I am reduced many stone, and shall be pleased to recommend them."

Mr. THOS BLAKELY, of 37 The Grove, Bedford, writes: "I have lost a little over 42lb. since taking your Tablets, and my case causes much local interest."

Miss F. L. BALL, 47 Chesterfield Road, St. Andrews, Bristol, writes: "I am quite cured through your Tablets. They improve the figure, and greatly relieve shortness of breath."

Miss PATIENT, of Woodberry, Theydon Bois: "Feel great benefit from Tablets. I have lost 2st., and am sufficiently reduced."

THE TRILENE COMPANY, 66 FINSBURY PAVEMENT, LONDON.

"Ruined!" she murmured. "How awful for you, Caleb. I am so sorry." She placed her hand again on his arm, and looked up at him regretfully. "Believe me, I feel for you more than I can say."

He looked at her dark, wistful face, that in spite of being careworn and somewhat haggard, was yet lovely enough to send a thrill of pain through him. "Yes, ruined!" he repeated bitterly. "It is as well that you are not really my wife, Violet—like the rest, you can leave the sinking ship to go down alone."

A slight flush stained her pale face. "Though there is that wrong on your conscience, Caleb," she said gently, "I do not reproach you with it—now—you may at least count me as a friend—and you know," she went on timidly, "that if what I have is of any use to you, it is at your service."

His face softened. "I have not sunk so low that I would take your money, Violet. I—I——" he stopped abruptly; the most bitter drop in his cup of humiliation was the knowknowledge that he could not help the son he had discovered.

As a rich man and a power in the City, he could have loaded that struggling son of his first wife with money and influence; but instead he had only a heritage of poverty to hand over to him.

To appear at the eleventh hour before his son as a bankrupt father was not the *rôle* he had marked out for himself. He had imagined, with a curious thrill of joy, revealing himself to that son as the parent who could make smooth the hard way of penury, and put before him the golden vista of speedily claiming Marcella as his wife.

But now that was all changed. In place of the influential father, holding out position and name to his son, he, Caleb J. Johnson, was a man cast from his high position in financial circles, and no more a byword for envy and adulation; rather a butt for scorn and ridicule.

He would not reveal himself now—what was the use? As a wealthy father, Philip Nullius might have overlooked his shortcomings, but a disgraced bankrupt was no acquisition to own as a parent.

"You mentioned something about a boy not half your own age. Who is it?" Lady Violet said suddenly, "and how has he beaten you?"

"Who is it?" he repeated slowly. "That arch liar and unscrupulous young scoundrel whom I took as my secretary at your own recommendation, Violet. That is the only bad turn you did me."

"Edward Day!" she winced, and her hand fell from his arm. "I do not understand! How could he have ruined you?"

"Like this." He laughed cynically. "I took an interest in him on account of the glowing letter of introduction you sent with him, and then let him have the control of my correspondence when I went—into the country. He forged cheques in my name, then when I charged him with it on my return, he blackmailed me with the knowledge of how I married you—which secret he gleaned from my private correspondence!"

He shut his teeth with a savage click, at the memory of how he had been outwitted by the cunning young secretary, whose brain had taken him up the scale, while he had traded on the knowledge of the financier's business secrets to betray him.

"If the letter of introduction you received with Edward Day was eulogistic in tone, then all I can say is that it was also a forgery," Lady Violet said slowly. "I might have known that he was bad enough to doctor a letter, but I am deeply regretful that he should have had the chance of hurting you still further."

The ex-Gold King smiled grimly. "Yes. he holds the winning card—at present, but when we meet I think that I shall get back a little of my own again." Afterwards he remembered his words with a thrill of horror, for it was murder that was in his heart when he spoke.

"Ah, Caleb, don't think of revenge now," she said suddenly. "Tell me instead what news you have of Marcella. I have written to—to my brother-in-law and sent two telegrams, but have received no answer. I fear," she shuddered, "God knows what I fear, but I can't wait much longer in suspense. I had hoped that Philip Nullius would have come to-day with news, but he has not."

"Is he in London still?"—the financier spoke sharply. He longed, yet feared, to meet the son he dared not own, and who, in spite of his father's fall from the ranks of the wealthy, was entitled to the position of a titled man on his mother's side. The fact that he could never owe anything to himself was gall and wormwood to the bitter man.

Lady Violet did not reply to his question. Her eyes were fixed on the door with a curiously listening look, and the pallor of her face was intensified.

"There is someone coming upstairs," she said in a low tone. "Oh, Caleb, can it be news of Marcella, do you think?"

"Perhaps," he answered reassuringly; "on the other hand it may be a message for me. I left word that I should be here in case an urgent caller arrived. They are, at last, really getting track of that mysterious man in the black beard."

"You mean—you mean——" she stammered; then, just as she was about to reply, the door was flung suddenly open and a tall figure swayed on the threshold, while, behind, another stood wrapped in gloom.

"Aunt Violet—oh, dear Aunt Violet!" and then before the stupefied woman, or the man by her side could utter a word. Marcella had run forward into the room with a little cry, and flung herself into the arms of Lady Violet.

"Marcella! Child!" the elder woman cried. "Oh, thank God! you are here—safe and—yes, and well!"—after a swift glance into the white face that rested on her shoulder. "How did you get here, my darling?" she went on; "I was just speaking to Mr. Johnson about you."

Marcella raised her face and glanced at the man who had taken a few steps away from her and her aunt.

"How did I get here?" she repeated in a low, vibrating tone. "Through the courage and devotion of a good woman who has suffered even more than I have! She sent me here while she took my place and went away with those men who wished to hide me from you."

Lady Violet's arms tightened round the girl's slender figure. "Thank God, my darling, that you are here—safe and well," she murmured brokenly; "but, but who is your friend? Bring her into the room, Caleb," she said, turning to the financier, who had remained a silent spectator of the meeting between aunt and niece.

"No—no—I will bring her to you myself," Marcella said quickly. And before the ex-millionaire could interfere, she had reached the side of the shrinking figure in the black cloak and heavy veil that concealed her face, and, taking her by the hand, led her forward into the room.

"Aunt Violet, be kind to her for my sake," she said in a low trembling voice. "She has only me now to look to. I dare not let her go back into his hands—I am afraid of him; he would be cruel to her—even more than before."

"Who is she?" Lady Violet said slowly, placing her white hand on the girl's shoulder. "Anyone of whom you are fond is sure to find a home with me."

"She is my—mother," Marcella answered, and, not hearing the sharp cry that came from her aunt, she flung back the thick veil that covered the woman's face. "See—Aunt Violet," she whispered, "the light has gone from her eyes—the windows of her soul are no longer clear, but I am all she has now. I cannot leave her—she is my mother!"

"Look at Dolly!" the woman said suddenly, her pale, wondering face breaking into a soft smile. "They said that Dolly died, but she didn't—oh, no, Dolly didn't die."

"She is thinking of my little sister who died years ago," Marcella murmured brokenly.

Lady Violet did not seem to hear her. Her large brown eyes were fixed with a look of amazement and stupefied joy in their depths upon the face of the woman who clung so childishly to the hand of Marcella.

"Laura—Laura!" she said in a hoarse whisper, "not dead—not dead! Then he lied in that as in all else; oh, my

Digitized by Google

dear, my dear!" She took the frail figure in her arms and pressed her lips to the white brow, great tears standing in her eyes the while.

"Violet, is that poor creature Sir Cyprian's wife?" the voice of the one-time Gold King spoke sharply. He had followed with unerring perception the tragedy underlying the meeting of the women.

She nodded silently; somehow tears were choking the words that she would speak. She could only press her lips again and again to the brow of the woman in her arms. Even Marcella was forgotten for the moment.

Marcella turned to Mr. Johnson. "I am so glad you are here," she said simply, reaching out her hand to him. "I can never go back to my father, Sir Cyprian; he has been cruel to me, and to my poor mother. He told me that he had hidden her for years at the Court because she was an escaped—criminal—lunatic. My mother to be that!" she broke out passionately. "And my father——" she shuddered, and, burying her face in her hands, burst into a storm of piteous tears.

The woman in Lady Violet's arms raised her head at the sound of the girl's weeping, and, with one of those swift flashes of intuition that often are the peculiarity of the mad, said suddenly: "The man with the black beard frightens us and Dolly; in the room of beautiful things he often stays, and I play with them and look at all the pictures."

Lady Violet suddenly drew back from the clinging, babbling creature, and, placing her in a chair some distance apart, said in a low tone of intreaty: "Marcella, where is Philip Nullius? Is he with you? I must speak to him."

"With me?" Marcella shook her head in surprise. Then her face flushed warmly as she went on. "But in future, Aunt Violet, Philip can be nothing to me—think what I am and who my poor mother is! I have no right to let him marry me."

A low cry rose to Lady Violet's lips, and she swayed towards the girl with outstretched hands. To the silent man looking on at the scene, it seemed that she was inspired by the spirit of sacrifice.

"Marcella, I cannot let you live in another moment's ignorance of the truth. You can, with a free conscience, be the wife of any man, for neither that poor soul hugging the waxen image of a child, nor Sir Cyprian, are your parents; you have been deceived, my darling, and I—God forgive me—have been forced into countenancing the deception."

Mr. Johnson, as he listened to the firm speech that came from the desperate woman's lips, forgot that he himself held a secret—not indeed one, but many. He was amazed that it could be possible for the lovely Society woman to also have a skeleton within her cupboard, of which he was not cognisant.

He began, with the wisdom of understanding, to perceive the drift of her confession—much that had puzzled him in the past was now being made clear. He seemed to have been forgotten by the two women who faced each other with wide eyes and white faces.

"Not my parents!" Marcella pushed back the heavy hair from her brow, and repeated the words mechanically. "Not my parents! I don't understand; then who am I, Aunt Violet? Who is my mother?"

There was a pause in which the ticking of an ormolu clock was the only sound in the room; then, low and distinct, came the answer for which the girl waited:

"I am your mother, Marcella!"

The ex-City magnate gripped the back of a chair with unconscious force. At last he knew the secret that had eaten the woman's heart out as a canker in a rose. Then he remembered the face of the man he had paid to get away from England. The man who had consented to bribery was Marcella's father!

"You—my mother!" a little laugh fluttered to the girl's lips. "I don't understand."

"Listen, dear one, let me tell you," the elder woman pleaded; "don't judge me until you have heard. When you were a little baby I was left suddenly without any money; my husband—your father—was a bad man; he deserted me. Then the man who married my only sister, Sir Cyprian Rust, offered me a yearly income on the condition that I let him bring you up as *his* daughter in the place of his own who had died, as I believed, with the gentle creature in that chair whose bright mind he blighted with a fearful shock."

She paused, as though to take breath, and her eyes, so like those of the white-faced girl opposite her, shone with a strange light.

"Child, *my* child, Marcella, can you forgive your mother?" she whispered. "Think of my loneliness all these years that you have been growing up, and I was denied the precious name of mother from your dear lips! Think of what I have suffered when, as each year passed by, I saw that that man was trying to put barriers between our meeting each other—holding over my head the price that he had paid for you! Oh, my dear, my dear! It is the way of the young to judge hardly the faults of others, but be gentle with me, for I am your mother—and I love you."

She sank on her knees at the feet of the girl whose face had ever and anon quivered as a note was struck within her by that low, vibrating voice.

The action of the figure at her feet roused her from her lethargy.

Mr. Johnson had slipped from the room a moment since, and the woman on the chair still played with the doll in her arms.

Marcella touched the shoulder of the kneeling suppliant for her love. "Mother! Mother!" she whispered, "don't kneel to me, dearest. It hurts me to see you—there. It is not fit; I want you, mother, to kiss me as your child."

With a glad little cry Lady Violet rose, and the next moment the arms of mother and child were clasped round each other in an embrace that said more than all the words and phrases in the world.

A few moments later Mr. Johnson re-entered the room. Lady Violet held out her hand. He took it, and pressed it gently to his lips. "I understand," he answered gently. Then he turned to Marcella gravely:

"Child, I have a telegram for you. It has just come with one for myself, concerning the imminent arrest of the man with the black beard at last. Open it and see what news it contains."

Paling with a sudden thought, Marcella drew closer to the side of her new-found mother. What could that telegram mean but news of the man she loved? Mr. Johnson, watching her, also grew nervous. Some instinct told him that the telegram was about Philip Nullius.

"*Philip Nullius—treachery—go Danger Point—urgent.*"

The telegram fluttered from the girl's fingers. "Philip is in danger," she cried; "treachery is luring him on to Danger Point. I know it. I was nearly killed myself there."

"Courage, darling," Lady Violet murmured; "he will be saved," and her eyes met Mr. Johnson's in a significant glance.

He smiled grimly and moved to the door. His small blue eyes flickered with a steely light, and his brow was suddenly moist.

"Where are you going?" Marcella cried eagerly.

He turned slowly.

"To the rescue of Philip Nullius!"

(Another long instalment of this serial will appear next week.)

She: "Should you call Tom's wife pretty?" He: "Well not unless I happened to be talking to Tom."

Miss Huggins: "My father is very good at reading faces." Mr. Kissam: "Then I had better not print any kisses here."

When a man has difficulty in finding an opportunity to propose he can make up his mind that the girl doesn't want him.

He: "Oh, that you would give me permission to lay my burning heart at your feet!" She: "You may; they are very cold."

Husband: "I thought you said you were going to get a cheap hat?" Wife: "I did. It's the trimmings that are expensive."

Digitized by Google

TOOTH-ACHE

CURED INSTANTLY BY

BUNTER'S Prevents Decay, Saves Extraction. Sleepless Nights Prevented.

Neuralgic Headaches and all Nerve Pains removed by BUNTER'S **NERVINE**. All Stores, 1s. 1½d. **NERVINE**

"As a specific for Toothache it has no equal. I have used it successfully for years."—Prof. W. WILSON, M.D.

2 PENCE DAILY

Any respectable person, male or female, can obtain a warranted cycle on easy payments of 1 shilling or more weekly. No guarantors required. Mutual trust between our patrons and ourselves. Catalogue Free. Symonds' London Stores, 124-128, City Rd., London, E.C.

TO CURE DRUNKARDS

without their knowledge. Send Stamp for FREE TRIAL PACKAGE of a wonderful remedy that has saved homes. Send no money. Address in confidence: WARD CHEMICAL Co., 51 Century House, Regent Street, London, W.

RIDER AGENTS WANTED

One in each district to ride and exhibit a sample 1904 Cycle. Highest grade fully warranted

BRITISH MADE CYCLES LATEST MODELS £2-10 to £6

New Departure Coaster Hubs, Best Makes Tyres, and best British made equipment throughout.

200 SECOND-HAND CYCLES all makes, good as new, £1 to £2-10

Great factory clearing sale at *half factory prices*. We send on approval and allow ***Ten Days' Free Trial*** on every cycle. **Money** with carriage charges **refunded** without question if you are not *satisfied*.

EARN A CYCLE taking orders from sample machine furnished by us. Our agents are making large profits. Write at once for **free catalogues** and our *special offer*. Tyres, Sundries, Sewing Machines, Phonos., *half prices*.

MEAD CYCLE CO. Dept. 44e, 85-97, Paradise Street, Liverpool, 19, Charing Cross Road, London, W.C.

A Good Cycle

At a FAIR price is cheaper than a poor Cycle at ANY price. Buy the best and avoid risks.

"CENTAURS," "COVENTRY CHALLENGE," "HUMBERS" "PREMIERS," "ROVERS," "SWIFTS," "SINGERS," &c.

Their names guarantee their quality.

FROM **8/-** MONTHLY.

A HIGH-GRADE COVENTRY CYCLE FOR £6

On approval. Two Years' Warranty. Write for Lists (Free).

EDWARD O'BRIEN Ltd. (Dept. S3), World's Largest Cycle Dealers, COVENTRY.

VARICOSE VEINS.

Bad Legs, etc., are completely Cured with inexpensive home treatment. It absolutely removes the pain, swelling, tiredness, and disease. Full Particulars on receipt of two stamps. S. S. Roberts, 45 Henley Road, Southsea.

FREEMAN'S

TRADE MARK

THE ORIGINAL & ONLY TRUE

CHLORODYNE

Best Remedy for Coughs, Colds, Asthma, Bronchitis, etc.

Of all Chemists, 1s. 1½d., 2s. 9d., 4s. 6d., and 6s., or postage free by the INVENTOR, R. FREEMAN, 70 KENNINGTON PARK ROAD, LONDON, S.E.

RECOMMENDED BY MEDICAL MEN.

N.B.—Lord Chancellor Selborne, Lord Justices James and Mellish, decided in favour of Freeman's Original Chlorodyne, and against Browne & Davenport, compelling them to pay all costs. —"Times," 24·7·73.

£8 10

From 6/- Monthly. Special Offer. 500 New Cycles £3 10s. 500 Genuine B.S.A. £6 10s. Sample Victory Motor Cycle £26. Sent carr. paid before payment. *Agents Wanted*

Dereham Rd. Cycle Co., Norwich

Secrets of Youth.

How to have a beautiful face and figure. How to have beautiful eyes and hair. How to curl the hair naturally without curling pins or tongs. Little people can be made tall. Noses that are red or ugly shape can be cured, and looks greatly improved.

This Pretty Book will be sent FREE. Ask for "BEAUTY'S BOUDOIR." Stamp must be sent for postage. Peralia Perfumery Co. (Dept. 14) 73 Camden Street, North Shields, Eng.

FREE TO YOU.

To advertise S.L.S. Records we are giving away our noted Phonographs for a limited time. Absolutely not a penny to pay for one. Write, giving full address and nearest railway station; enclose stamp. Mention this paper.

SYMONDS' LONDON STORES, 124-128 CITY ROAD, LONDON

JUNO CYCLES ARE THE VERY BEST.

FOR LADIES & GENTLEMEN.

Complete with **All Fittings** and Carriage Paid.

12 MONTHLY CASH OR PAYMENTS of

£8 0 0 „ 15/- ea.
8 8 0 „ 15/10 „
9 0 0 „ 16/8 „
9 10 0 „ 17/6 „

JUNO Motor Cycles, £32 or 12 Payments of 60/- each.

JUNO Two-Speed Gear Cycles, £12 12s., or 12 Payments of 23/4 each. Write for New Season's List of JUNO Cycles and Accessories; over 130 pages and Hundreds of Illustrations, sent post free.

Metropolitan Machinists' Co. Ltd., S.S. Dept., 75 Bishopsgate Street Without, London E.C.; and Piccadilly Circus, London, W.

REAL DEVONSHIRE CREAM (Clotted).

Absolutely pure; no preservatives used; the most efficacious substitute for cod liver oil, invaluable for children and invalids; ½lb. 1/4; 1lb. 2/4; 2lbs. 4/4, free; supplied constantly to the Countesses Cadogan, Pembroke, Sefton, Dundonald, Guilford, Lichfield, etc., by **Mrs. Conyers, Chagford, R.S.O., Devon.**

"NO BETTER FOOD."

Dr. ANDREW WILSON, F.R.S.E., &c.

Fry's PURE CONCENTRATED Cocoa.

"Strongest and Best."

—Health.

Half a teaspoonful is sufficient to make a cup of most delicious Cocoa.

Digitized by Google

Conducted by CYNTHIA.

[In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of SHORT STORIES.*]*

Love Not Always Passionate.

"WILLIE'S" young lady is of the unemotional kind. She says she is very fond of "WILLIE," but when he writes her passionate love-letters, she only laughs, and he cannot make love to her in a proper way, for the reason that she seems to take nothing seriously. "WILLIE'S" question is: "Does this mean that she does not care for me? Surely a girl really in love would not laugh at her lover?"

* * * * *

I have no doubt she is as fond of you as she says she is. Perhaps, in reality, she loves you as much as she could love anybody. It is not always well to be too passionate. Passionate lovers often prove to be the most fickle, and soonest tired of their sweethearts, while such girls as yours when they really have allowed themselves to get fond of a man, very often remain constant to him always.

The Age for Marriage.

"I AM twenty-five, and not in love," writes "HERBERT." "I have decided not to marry, or get entangled with any girl, until I am thirty, when my position should be secured. Am I wise in this decision, or do you think I should seek a sweetheart now?"

* * * * *

I think you are wise. If you have not fallen in love by now you cannot be of a very susceptible nature. Marriage without love is not to be advised, so I should just wait until the young lady of your heart appears, and marry her right away. Thirty is quite a good age for a man to marry, but you must remember that the girls are not so easily attracted as a man gets older, so you may be losing opportunities.

Non-Dancers at Dances.

"W. I." likes girls, but doesn't know where to meet them. "Should I," he asks, "go to dances? I don't dance, and don't care for dancing, but I should like to meet the girls. Do men who don't dance go to dances, and, if so, how do they get on with the ladies? I ask for information, as I know nothing about the matter."

* * * * *

I should not recommend a non-dancer to go to dances. Of all the figures not to be envied, I think the male wall-flower is the worst. If the girls take any notice of him at all, it is always with a touch of pity and patronage, for a man who dances badly, or not at all, is regarded as lacking in a great accomplishment. So I do not recommend you to go to dances, if your wish is to make the favourable acquaintance of some nice girls. Try some other method.

The Despondent Lover.

"MY lover gets despondent often," writes "PAULA." "There has been insanity in his family. Do you think I ought to break off an engagement?" "PAULA" should not do so unless she has good ground for believing the despondency to be caused by mental disorder. It may be due to liver, or natural character. It would not be a bad idea for her to arrange somehow that he should meet a doctor friend of hers, or, at any rate, somebody able to form a good judgment about the young man's state of mind, and take their opinion on the subject.

* * * * *

It would be quite wrong for "PAULA" to jump to the conclusion that mere fits of despondency are caused by insanity. A man may have insanity in his family, and be none the worse for it.

A Jealous Lover.

"E. R. T." is troubled with a lover who is too jealous. The other day she met a young man friend, and in parting, shook hands with him. Her lover witnessed this, and when she rejoined him, he said: "What do you mean by letting that fellow hold your hand, and look into your eyes like that?" "E. R. T." was most annoyed, and they parted in a tiff. Some days have elapsed, and he has not called to see her. She is very fond of him, but asks me if I do not advise her to break off with so jealous an admirer.

* * * * *

I shouldn't break it off. Let him come and apologise. As you are sure in your own mind that you did not pass the bounds of ordinary social courtesy with the other young man, you are quite right in taking up the attitude you have. If your admirer cannot trust you to shake hands with a man friend, he must indeed be foolish. I hope he will repent of his absurdity.

A Girl Who Must Walk Out.

"I HAVE known a postman for about twelve months," writes "WILD ROSE"; "he is about nineteen or twenty. I like him very much indeed, and am miserable if I don't see him nearly every day. But I have never walked out with him, and don't know whether he likes me or not, but I think he does. One day last week, he asked me to see him after he was done at the office, but he didn't take me for a walk as I expected, but simply stood talking for quite an hour. He did not take me home. I should like to know what his feelings are towards me?"

* * * * *

I should think his feelings are quite what you want them to be. Why on earth a young man should be compelled to take a girl for a walk to show his love, I do not know. It seems to me that true love can be expressed as well standing still as walking about. "WILD ROSE" should try to judge his feelings towards her by what he says, and the way he says it, and not attach so much importance to whether he stood still and said it, or walked about. From your description of the young man, I imagine he is quite as drawn to you as you are to him, but perhaps his duties prevent his devoting too much time to you. Besides, a postman gets tired of walking.

An Uninvited Lover.

"ADA," writes: "Some people have asked me to stay with them in the Spring. They know that I am engaged, and also know my *fiancé*, but they have not even hinted that he should accompany me during the stay, or visit me while I am there. Would you accept the invitation, as my lover is not included?"

* * * * *

I think they have made an oversight in not asking your young man to visit them. They need not necessarily have asked him to stay the whole time you are there, but a short visit, or even an invitation to spend a day, would have been quite usual. Perhaps it has only been a slip, and not intentional. I should not refuse the invitation, but when you are on your visit, hint that you would very much like your sweetheart to visit you.

Cynthia

Printed by HORACE COX, Bream's Buildings, London, E.C., and published by C. ARTHUR PEARSON LTD., Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

Digitized by Google

A GENTLE HINT

to remind you that

No. 2 of

The RAPID REVIEW

IS NOW ON SALE.

A Concise Résumé of—

The War.
The Chinese Labour Question.
Army Reform.
The Fiscal Question, &c.

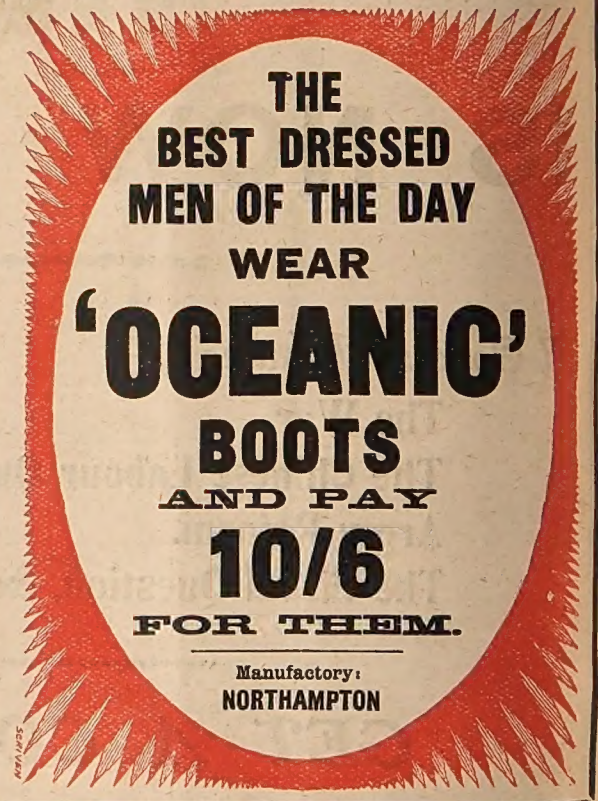
The Month's

Books.
Magazines.
Music.
Art, &c.

GET A COPY TO-DAY.

Digitized by Google

FENDERS
AND
BEDSTEADS
of Every Description
Direct from Works.
Also CURBS, FIRE IRONS, BRASSES, FIRE GUARDS, &c.
Send particulars of your requirements.
Sketches and Prices can be sent on at once.
SPARKHILL FENDER AND BEDSTEAD CO.,
B88 DURHAM ROAD, BIRMINGHAM.



"MENE"
A
SAMPLE ½ DOZEN
OF THESE FAMOUS
SANITARY TOWELS
IN ASSORTED SIZES, WILL BE SENT
POST FREE FOR SIX STAMPS.
NONE EQUAL THEM FOR CLEANLINESS COMFORT & ECONOMY.
SOLD BY ALL UNDERCLOTHING HOUSES AND CHEMISTS.
LADIES SHOULD WRITE FOR SAMPLE TO MISS HAYNES, 55, FANN ST. LONDON E.C.

Digitized by Google